"The poor widow fell on her knees before the king, of whose slightest notice she deemed herself to be quite unworthy."—p. 130.

A BRAID OF CORDS.

BY

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PREFACE.

I have gathered a few CORDS from the Scripture Treasury, and twined them together into one braid, setting the dark against the light, the black beneath the golden. May He whom I humbly seek to serve, bless this my little work, and deign to make it useful to those who may glance on my BRAID OF CORDS.

A. L. O. E.

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A BRAID OF CORDS.

CHAPTER I.

The Old Man at Home.

So I am not to stir out of the house till spring, and we are not yet half through the winter! I have been a prisoner these ten weeks already! Well, well, there is surely no cause for grumbling. This dear old farm is a pleasant kind of prison, and Charley and his wife, and my merry little Kate, might make a duller place cheerful. A thankless old sinner I should be if, after nearly threescore years and ten of good health, I should complain of a few months of sickness. I am not bed-ridden, like so many of the aged; I have still the use of my eyes and my ears, and write as easily as I ever did in my youth. My limbs fail me a little, my cough breaks my rest at night, and I have much rheumatic pain,—yet I have every cause for gratitude to a merciful Providence that mine, on the whole, is a green old age, and that I am surrounded by mercies.

Still, I own it to my shame, time does hang rather heavy on my hands. The days seem long, I cannot deny it, short as they are at this time of the year. Charley is out before daybreak, looking after the farm; I see but little of him. My daughter-in-law,

Anne, is much too busy and active a housewife to waste much time in gossip, and Kate is away all day at her school. A neighbour calls scarce once in the week, seeing that we live in an out-of-the-way nook, quite off the high-road. As long as there is light to work by, I am left pretty much to myself; and where is the hardship in that? Surely, in a long life such as mine, I should have learned to make some good use of the hours, and this season of quiet and rest is doubtless kindly given to me, that I may prepare for the great change which cannot be very far off. But I have been a man of action; I've liked work for work's sake: one cannot be all day reading and thinking, and it does seem to me that the most tiresome kind of life is that in which there is nothing to tire one. I dislike, more than many other people would do, to be laid on the shelf like a bit of cracked china.

What shall I do till spring comes to let a fidgety old man out of his prison? There's no use in more netting; I've made already more nets than Charley has fruit-bushes to cover, and I cannot make up my mind, notwithstanding Anne's hints, to take to netting white curtains for her trim little parlour. As for the few books at Beechwood farm, I know them all half by heart already. I cannot, like some other old men, make myself happy for hours with a pipe, for I never was given to smoking, and, if I were, Anne would never put up with it in her house, which, to do her justice, she keeps as clean as a bright new pin. I wish that I could make myself useful, if it were but in rocking a baby's cradle, or teaching a child his letters. There have been so many times in my life when I could not crowd into the day all the duties which it brought, and have had to borrow hours of the night; when I could scarcely snatch a few minutes for a meal, but have thrust my bread

and cheese into my pocket, that I might take my dinner as I sped on my way! I was often weary enough then, but not half so weary as I am now, as I sit alone staring for hours into the fire, or counting the number of planks between me and the door. I have been wont to think time more precious than money, and now I fear that I sometimes wish to get rid of it as fast as I may; and for all my foolish wishing, time sticks to me like a burr!

Thoughts such as these passed often and often through my mind as I sat in my arm-chair before the fire, with my feet on the fender, and not a sound to be heard but the crackling of the wood in the grate, or Anne's quick step overhead, or the sleepy crowing of the cock from the yard at the back of the farm. I do not say that mine were right thoughts; I have often taken myself to task for what seemed almost like discontent. I've often said to myself that a Christian should never feel lonely, and never be idle. But aching limbs, and racking cough, and infirmities of old age, against my will, make me the one, and I have found it hard not to feel the other. I have been tempted to think that an old man has lived long enough, that Charley and Anne could do very well without me, and that even my darling little Kate,—well, well, I believe that she would miss her grandad, but that merry young heart could never hold sorrow for long.

One day, amidst these dull musings, a bright thought darted up in my mind, just as yon little jet of clear flame has burst out from that blackened log in the grate. I told no one in the farm what had come into the brain of old Arthur; but when Ben, the butcher, called next morning, I took him aside, drew a half-crown from my brown leather purse, and asked him to buy something for me that I wanted, the next

time he should drive through the town. Having decided on making my purchase, I was almost as impatient to have the thing on which I had set my heart as a child might be to whom a toy had been promised. Notwithstanding my age, I found I had a good deal left in me of the eager Arthur, who, when a boy, would wade the stream, even in winter, rather than lose a few minutes by going round by the bridge.

"No use being in a hurry," I would often say to myself as I stirred the fire, or put on the logs; "I shall have them before I am ready for them. A man with the frost of age on his head, and the burden of nearly seventy years on his back, ought long ago to have learned how to wait with patience."

But I own that I was mightily pleased when, in the dusk of a December evening, my Kate, tripping home from school, brought me a parcel tied up in brown paper, which she told me that Ben, who had chanced to meet her by the way, had asked her to take to her old grandad at the farm. Of course I knew what was in the parcel, so I looked at it quietly enough, turned it round, and set it down upon my knee, while little Kate was all eagerness and curiosity; for parcels never come for old Arthur Astwood, save one from my married daughter at Christmas, a parcel which we count upon as surely as we count on berries on the holly, or Anne's prime mince-pies on the table.

"I wonder you don't open your parcel, grandad; I should if it were mine—quick! quick!" cried Katie, as she stood beside me, her cheeks glowing from the frosty air till they matched her little tartan cloak, on which lay a few white flakes, for the evening was closing in with snow.

"What do you guess is in it, Birdie?" said I, slowly unfastening the knot in the cord.

"Two books,—I can tell that by the feel and the weight. Oh! how glad we shall be to have new books, and such big ones too!" cried Katie. "I hope that they will both be full of pictures."

The word "books" made Anne pause in her occupation of laying cups and saucers on the table, to glance at my brown paper parcel. It drew also the attention of Charley, who had just come in from the farmyard, and who, well taught by his wife, was stamping the snow from his hob-nailed boots on the mat before crossing the clean-washed floor.

"You may open the parcel yourself, Katie," said I, as soon as I had taken off the string. The eager child needed no second bidding, the cover was off in a moment; but Kate's look of joyful expectation as she opened and turned over the pages of one book after the other turned to one as blank as their leaves.

"No stories—no pictures—nothing!" she exclaimed, in a tone of disappointment. "What's the use of two empty books?"

"What's the use of empty cups but to have something put in them?" said I. "Some of my lonely hours I intend to use in filling up every page of these books. This brown one will be for my private journal."

"Are you going to write your life?" enquired Anne, and I could see by her grim half-smile that she thought that I had far better take to netting the curtains.

"No," I quietly replied, "in this brown book I shall only, as it were, talk to myself upon paper, put down a few of my thoughts, meant for no eye but my own. But in the red book I shall try to set

down some anecdotes or stories gleaned from my past experience in life, which may possibly be of some interest to others."

"Oh! that will be famous," cried Katie. "You will write all about the seaside place where you were born—and the school—and the boat adventure—and your sailing away to Canada—and living in a log hut—and the dreadful shipwreck when you came home. And you will tell all that happened to you when you were in England again, and what you did when you were a city missionary and went about visiting the poor. But you will need a book much bigger than that, grandad, if you mean to put everything down."

"No, Katie, I am not going to put everything down," I replied; "but I have been thinking over many things that I have seen, and people whom I have known; and I fancy that I might write a few stories combining some amusement with a little instruction." I felt somewhat shy, even at my age, in confessing that I was going to become an author, even in the humblest way; so I kept my eyes on the bit of string which I held in my hands, and set about twisting and untwisting the end of it, as if so doing could somehow help me on in my work of composing a volume.

"You could as well draw gold sovereigns out of that cord as either amusement or instruction out of the history of most men's lives," observed Anne, as she pushed the butter-dish towards Charley, who had taken a chair and was sitting at the round table.

"Now it is odd enough, Anne," said I, "that it is just from cords that I mean to draw my stories, or, I should rather say, the plan of my little book is all laid out with cords."

"Cords!" repeated Katie in surprise. Honest

Charley rubbed his forehead, as he always does when he is puzzled; and I could see by a glance at Anne's face that she thought that the poor old man must be going out of his mind.

"A cluster of stories, like a bunch of beads, should be strung upon something," said I, in explanation, "and I choose to string mine on cords. I should not care to write anything that might not lead my readers to think more of the Bible, and the Bible tells us much about cords."

Charley rubbed his forehead again.

"You mean the cords that bound Samson," said Anne.

"Or the cord that Rahab let down from her window," cried Kate; "are you going to write about that?"

"There are other cords mentioned in the Bible," I replied; "cords used as figures of speech, and intended to convey lessons of warning or comfort. We read of the CORDS OF SIN, the CORDS OF AFFLICTION, the threefold CORD OF FRIENDSHIP, and the SILVER CORD OF LIFE. My plan is to bind up each of my stories, as it were, with one of these cords. For days and days I've been thinking over the subject; and while the seed lies under the clods in the fields, and the snow lies above them, and I'm bound to the fireside by aches and pains, I may be sowing a few grains of thought which, with a blessing from above, may yield a little crop of instruction for those who care to gather it."

"Father, what do you think of grandad's writing a book?" cried Katie, turning to her parent.

"No doubt he can do it," replied honest Charley; "he's been used to writing and teaching; but for myself, I'd rather plough the nine-acre field with a team of cats, or clip yon hedge with my wife's nail-

scissors, as take to filling up that there red book, to say nothing of the brown one."

"Do you mean to print and publish your stories when you've written them?" asked Anne, in her dry, matter-of-fact way.

"I'm not sure—we'll see about that," I replied, a little discouraged by her tone. "I've known for some years a gentleman who publishes these kind of things, and who has more than once put pieces of mine in the magazine which he edits. But I need not decide on how I shall dispose of my chickens before they are hatched."

"You'll read your stories to us first, father, on Sunday evenings," said Charley.

"Oh! I hope that you will!" cried Katie; "then we'll have them instead of that book in the old black leather cover, which I don't understand one bit, and which always sets mother yawning."

"You little rogue!" exclaimed Charley, "I never catch your mother yawning."

"No, because you are fast asleep yourself," laughed the child.

On the very next day I set to my work, and pleasant work I found it to be. I felt no longer lonely; my book was my friendly companion; the very hands of the clock seemed to go their rounds at a quicker pace as my pen moved over the pages. I half forgot my pains and weakness as I retraced in my red book the old days when I was hearty and young. Katie took as much interest in my work as I did myself. When she returned home at dusk, before taking off her tartan cloak, or even setting down the basket in which she always carried her dinner to the school, she would run up to me with the question, "How are you getting on with your CORDS? Shall we have one upon Sunday, grandad?"

Then she would count the pages covered with writing, and try and make out some of the words, not an easy task to my Birdie, who finds an old man's crabbed hand much harder to read than the print in her books. It is only my red book that is open to my grandchild; this brown one, in which I am now writing, I keep solely for myself. But my greatest satisfaction in my work arises from its being one over which I can pray; I never open my red book and take up my pen without a prayer that I may be guided to write what may prove *a word in season* to some poor fellow-sinner. I feel as I have felt in London when, as a city missionary, I have started on my morning round amongst the dwellings of the poor.

"Teach me, Lord, how to teach! help me, that I may help others!" such has been the prayer of my heart, both when I laboured actively in the noisy, crowded city, and when I sat—as I now do—alone, in a quiet country home, with the wintry sun shining in between the leafless branches of the elms.

"A poor, feeble old man cannot now join in the fight against vice and misery," I say to myself as I dip my pen in the ink; "but here, in my peaceful nook, I may, as it were, string a bow for those who must bear the brunt of the strife. I cannot now actively labour as I once did in my Master's vineyard, but I can twine a few rushes, that others with them may bind up some clusters of fruit. I have only one talent to lay out; but I have no right to bury it if I can use it, in however humble a way, for the service of my great Master."

Last Sunday my first little tale was ready. It was the first Sunday in the New Year; the weather was very bleak and cold, and threatening a storm. Weather never keeps Anne from attendance at

church; wrapt in her thick brown cloak, with her strong umbrella in hand, my daughter-in-law looks ready to face rain, snow, or hailstorm. Katie trips along as cheerfully, holding her father's strong hand, as if it were a pleasure to battle against the north wind. I watched from the window the party as they started for church, Charley carrying the books, for Anne found that she had enough to do in managing her umbrella, which the wind was trying to blow inside out. The three tramped slowly through the snow, which lay ankle-deep in the lane. I watched them, blessing them in my heart, till the little tartan cloak which showed so red and warm against the background of snowy-white landscape could be seen no more, and then I returned to my seat, and heaped great logs on the fire. After so doing, I read to myself the Morning Prayers, which I hope that I read in a thankful spirit, my heart joining with the worshippers whom I could no longer join in person.

It was nearly two o'clock before the party returned, cold but cheerful, ready to do full justice to the dinner of steaming hot broth, which on Sundays I am trusted to prepare. Even Anne herself, a first-rate cook, allows me some credit for my broth. The Sunday dinner is always a cheerful, sociable meal; we talk over the sermon, and I hear whether poor old Mrs Mayne was able to get to church, and whose baby has been christened, and whose banns have been called. Sundays seem to join one in bonds of kindly intercourse with neighbours of whom one sees nothing and hears nothing during the rest of the week.

But, however pleasant the Sabbath day, the evenings have been, I own, somewhat dull in winter, our few books being old and dry ones. Katie's account of her mother yawning, and her father drop-

ping asleep, had been, I fear, a true one. On last Sunday, however, there was something new to keep their attention alive, and Katie forgot even her usual amusement of playing with the kitten, that she might draw her little rush-bottomed chair close to me, so that she could rest her arms on my knee, and look up into my face as I read. Charley sat at the opposite side of the fire-place, looking, as he always does, the picture of quiet contentment. He is a farmer who, unlike ninety-nine out of a hundred, never grumbles at the weather, and who keeps his temper even when heavy showers come down on his newly-mown hay. The only one of my auditors in whom I could fear to find a critic was Anne, she being a woman who forms very decided opinions, and who is wont to take care that every one near her should know them. Anne is, perhaps, a little too strong in will and resolute in manner; but she rules her house with diligence, and is a valuable wife to my son. She sat upright on her high-backed chair, dressed in the black poplinet which she only wears upon Sundays, with her hands folded on her lap. I could see from the way in which she pressed her lips together that Anne was resolved not to yawn.

The wind whistled and roared on that first Sunday in the New Year, rattling the window-frames, and shaking the door, as if making a violent attempt to force its way into the house. But it was shut out from the snug, warm home, and its raging made us but feel more thankful for the comforts around us. The night was dark as well as stormy; there was not a gleam of moonlight on the snow, not a star to glimmer between the dark clouds. But the red flames roared and crackled merrily as they rushed up the wide chimney, and cast a warm glow on the group gathered round the fire, and the kitten asleep

on the hearth-rug. The glow was so bright that the lighted candle on the mantel-piece was not needed; it was by the red firelight that I, old Arthur Astwood—with a little shy cough as a prelude—read aloud my opening story.

I had, as will be seen in my tales, decided on always writing of myself in the third person, so as to avoid bringing in that word "I," which, when often repeated, so jars on the ear. "Take care of Number One," says the proverb; it seems to me that the best care which we can take of it is, as far as possible to lock it up, and keep it well out of the way. If I could have written my stories without bringing myself in at all, I should very gladly have done so; but as I write of what I have heard and seen, Arthur must appear in the tales. Of course, in repeating from memory conversations held many years ago, I can only give their substance; I take my recollections of past scenes, vivid or dull as they may be, and mould them into shape as clay vessels might be moulded, to hold the lesson, drawn from experience, which I desire, through them, to convey.

CHAPTER II.

Cords of Sin.

"No, I should not willingly have crossed the wide sea, and left old England, perhaps for ever, without first going to say good-bye to my earliest friend," said Arthur Astwood to himself, as he trudged along the dusty high road, with his bundle hanging from a stick over his shoulder. Arthur was soon to start for Canada, but he had resolved before sailing to see the companion of his boyhood, Jack Ewell, whom he had not met for the last five years. Arthur Astwood had taken a twenty miles' walk on a hot autumn day for the purpose of making this visit.

"Jack told me that I should know his cottage by its being the middle one of seven on the right side of the road," thought Arthur, as he reached a row of small dwellings, with tiny gardens before them. "He need not have told me which of the seven is his home; I could have found that out for myself by the look of the place. There's but one garden here that has not a weed in its border, not so much as a bit of chickweed lurking beside the paling. The tiny plots are neat as samplers, with a pattern of white pebbles round them; I can see Jack's hand in all that. What a magnificent rose-tree that is that climbs up the wall! Jack had always a fancy for roses. And there's a neat little stand for flower-pots fixed in the window; I'll be bound that Jack made the miniature paling and gate, and painted them green, and arranged the flowers himself. No,

perhaps that last part of the work fell to the share of his merry young wife. I never saw Jane Ewell but on the day of the wedding, five years ago; but she looked then, with her plump rosy cheeks, and bright pleasant smile, just the girl to make a home happy."

All this passed through the mind of Arthur as he stood before the garden gate, shaking the dust from his boots, and wiping his heated brow, that he might look less like a tramp before entering the neat little dwelling. The front door of the cottage was open, so likewise was the back one, which led into the yard, and through the doorways Arthur caught sight of a very fine little boy, about four years of age, who was watching his father mending a bit of the paling behind. Arthur heard the sound of the hammer of Jack, but could not see his figure from the place where he stood.

"There's a strange man at the gate," cried the boy; and as his father did not at once attend to his announcement, the child repeated it again in a louder, shriller tone, "I say, there's a man at the gate."

Jack paused in his knocking, and glanced through the back doorway to see who the stranger might be. The moment that he caught sight of his friend, down dropped the hammer from Jack's grasp, and he hurried to meet Arthur Astwood, almost knocking over in his haste a little girl of about two years old, who was toddling about in the cottage. The father caught up the child, perhaps as the shortest method of putting her out of his way, and with his little daughter on his shoulder and his boy at his heels, was soon at the garden gate, heartily wringing the hand of his friend.

It was a pleasant thing to see that fine, powerfully-built man, with his sun-burnt face lit up with pleasure, as he stood at the gate of his happy

"'Heartily glad to see you, old boy! well, this is an unexpected pleasure, said Jack."—p. 21.

home—the home won by his own honest toil—with his two rosy children, one perched aloft on his shoulder, the other close at his side, both pictures of health and beauty. The boy, especially, might have served as the model for an artist, so rich was the mass of his curly golden locks, so brilliant the roses on his cheeks.

"Heartily glad to see you, old boy! well, this is an unexpected pleasure," cried Jack. "I was talking to my missus about you this morning, and saying that I did not think that you would sail from old England without looking in on us here. Jane, Jane, here's Arthur Astwood come to see us," shouted Ewell, as he led the way to the cottage, still with little Bess on his shoulder, her small chubby hand clutching his hair.

Jane, who had just laid the clean white cloth for dinner, came forward and gave a welcome as cordial and pleasant as every good wife should give her husband's old friend. Mrs Ewell looked quite as well in her neat print gown, with her hair braided smoothly across a brow that never was furrowed, as she had done on the day of her wedding. She appeared scarcely an hour older, though perhaps a little stouter in person, than she had done when Ewell placed the plain gold ring on her finger. It was clear that Jane had been leading a happy life; that there had been nothing but peace and love between her and her husband, and that it was not only on the outside of their home that the sunbeams shone and the roses bloomed.

Mrs Ewell seemed to be as much pleased as her husband at the arrival of their guest. Arthur was told that he had come at such a good hour, dinner hour; and on such a fortunate day, boiled beef day; and then the bright little housewife hastened to cover

the table with the steaming food, which spread a savoury odour around. Jane would stop every now and then in her occupation to listen and smile as her husband showed off to his guest their children, of whom Jack was evidently both very fond and very proud.

"You must make friends, Arthur, with my little queen here, though she's a bit shy with strangers. Come, come, Bess," said the fond father, as he took a seat, and changed the little one's perch from his shoulder to his knee, "you must shake hands with my friend. What, you won't?" Jack stroked back the curly locks from the brow of his child, and kissed it. "There, show him the pretty blue necklace that daddy bought at the fair, and your fine new pair of red shoes." The little girl put out her tiny feet, though she would not hold out her hand. "There's a beauty!" cried Ewell, gaily; "the little lass likes to be smart, as older lasses do." He laughed, and Jane, as she set down the dish of boiled beef, laughed merrily also.

Jack Ewell was a pious man, and did not begin his meal, as too many do, without giving thanks to the Giver of all good. The silence which would otherwise have prevailed in the cottage while the grace was being said, was broken by the noisiness of the children. Little Bess's red-shoed feet were kicking the leg of the table, and Tom was taking advantage of the attention of his elders being engaged in an act of devotion, to pull towards himself a pewter pot of porter, and bury his rosy lips in the froth. He uttered a howl of anger when Arthur quietly put the liquor beyond the reach of his hand.

"We don't mind what the little chap takes," said Jack Ewell, who had noticed the movement; "he eats and drinks like a ploughman, and you'll own he

does credit to his fare." The parent looked with fond pride at his beautiful boy, then went on, as he carved the boiled beef, "My Tom there is as big as John Barnes, our neighbour's son, who is two years older than he, and Tom has twice his spirit and strength. Our chap the other day got hold of my hammer, and hit the cat such a blow, that had not Jane come and taken the hammer away, I believe a second such knock would have killed the poor brute outright. That boy has amazing strength for his age."

"I hope that he will find some better way of using it," observed Arthur, who was little pleased to see the look of conscious pride on the face of the boy.

"I'll knock the cat's head right off next time!" exclaimed the young bully, clenching his fist with an air of defiance. Ewell and his wife only laughed; but Arthur saw nothing to laugh at, being pretty sure that this hero would not so have struck at a bull-dog.

The social meal in Ewell's cottage was partaken of very cheerfully. It was pleasant to talk over past days, and to chat about future prospects. The only drawback to Arthur's enjoyment of the society of his friend and his wife was the tiresome behaviour of Tom. The boy must be served before any one else, and served to the best of what was before them. Even Mrs Ewell at last looked a little ashamed at the greedy rudeness of her child, and offered a kind of apology to her guest, and mildly rebuked her boy; but Jack seemed to think that neither apology nor rebuke was called for.

"Never mind his little ways," cried Ewell, patting Tom on the head, "he'll know better in time; remember he's only a child."

"Only a child!" thought Arthur Astwood. "If

he be a bully and a glutton when he is only a child, what will he be when a man?"

"Now, Arthur, my good fellow," said Ewell, rising from the table, "we must drink a pleasant voyage to you, and a safe and happy return. We've a little prime whisky here," he added, opening a cupboard in the corner of the room, in which Jane kept her stores. "Nay, Arthur, you must not object, though you are not a drinker of spirits; you know well that I, like yourself, am a temperate man. I've had this bottle here for a twelvemonth, and never drawn the cork; but this is a grand occasion,—not one that comes every day,—and a drop will do you no harm, but good, after your long tiring walk."

Arthur knew that the drop would do him no harm, but he wished the bottle in the cupboard, and the whisky in the sea, when Jack, after helping his friend and his wife to a moderate quantity of the spirits, which they both mixed with water, poured out some for himself, and, before raising the glass to his own lips, held it out to his eager boy.

"Jack, Jack!—that's enough!" cried Jane Ewell, in a tone of mild expostulation.

"See how the young cub smacks his lips—he likes the taste!" laughed the father.

Arthur could no longer keep silence. "Jack Ewell," said he, "I've no right perhaps to meddle with your management of your children; but were that boy mine, I'd as soon encourage in him a liking for prussic acid as for spirits; I'd as soon put a sharp razor into his little hand as a glass of whisky."

Jack looked a little surprised at the warmth with which Arthur spoke, perhaps a little vexed also. "I'm no friend to hard-drinking," he said; "I've seen too much of the ruin which it causes to body

and soul. I've marked a verse in my Bible, which I mean to teach my boy as soon as he is old enough to learn it, and take in its meaning." And Jack repeated a passage from the 23rd chapter of the Book of Proverbs:—"*Who hath woe, who hath sorrow, who hath contentions, who hath babbling, who hath wounds without cause, who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine.*"

"Depend upon it, Jack," cried Arthur, earnestly, "you are beginning already to teach your boy something very different indeed from these words of Scripture. Young as he is, he can take in the meaning of what he sees, and will not quickly forget what he learns. The Bible says of the drunkard's draught, '*At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*' You have seen in a hundred cases how true is that word, yet you would give your child the serpent to play with, because you think that its fangs are not grown; you would set your boy to pull daisies on the top of a precipice, and deem it enough to say to him, 'Mind that you do not fall over.' You may be certain of one thing, Ewell; children think more of our actions than of our words—they are ready to do what they see that we do, especially if it square with their own inclination, and we only waste our breath in telling them to go upon one path, if we lead them by our example but one step on the other."

Jack made no direct reply; his sunburnt cheek looked a little more flushed than usual. He addressed himself to his son, "Now, little chap, I say, you've eaten as much as is good for you, so be off with you, and play." As he spoke, he lifted the boy from his chair.

Off ran Tom, nothing loath, for his eye had been attracted by Arthur's stick, which had been placed

against the wall, and the boy had a fancy to ride round the garden upon it. The cottage was all the pleasanter from the absence of the young pickle—at least so it seemed to the guest.

"We won't let you leave us to-night, Mr Astwood," said the hospitable Jane. "You will not, I hope, mind sleeping in our little back-room; I will put it to rights in five minutes. It will be such a pleasure to Jack to talk with you in the evening when he comes home from his work."

Jack seconded his wife's invitation, which Arthur gladly accepted. He felt quite at home in the cottage, to which he so kindly was welcomed. Being very fond of children, Arthur soon made friends with the little girl, even coaxing her to sit upon his knee by the attraction of bits of sweet chocolate stick, which he happened to have in his pocket. Arthur Astwood then sang a merry song to the child, the sound of which attracted her little brother from the garden. Tom came in so quietly that his entrance was not observed, at least by the guest.

"Holloa, young chap! what are you after?" suddenly exclaimed Jack Ewell; and Arthur at the same moment felt a small hand withdrawn from his pocket, and Tom, in evident alarm, ran to the farthest corner of the room.

"You have taken something from my pocket," said Arthur, looking gravely at the boy, whose face was glowing crimson to the roots of his curly hair.

"I have not!" replied the child fiercely, backing close up to the wall. His hand was tightly clenched, and he kept it behind his back.

"We'll soon make sure!" exclaimed Jack, starting up from the table. Two strides brought him up to the child; he caught hold of Tom's closed fist, and in an instant forced from it a bit of chocolate

stick. The boy uttered a yell of passion, and with the other hand, which was free, he actually struck at his father. Arthur was greatly shocked and disgusted at wickedness shown at so early an age.

"You deserve a flogging, you little rogue!" cried Jack Ewell, not looking, however, in the least as though intending to inflict one.

"To think of your showing off so badly before Mr Astwood!" cried Jane. "I am quite ashamed that our friend should see such a naughty little boy!"

"Arthur won't be hard on him," said Jack, with a careless air. "Boys will be boys, and Tom is but a child;" and, as if satisfied with this excuse, Ewell took up his cap, and prepared to leave the cottage.

"You will rest here quietly, Arthur, after your walk," said he; "I must be off to the wheat-field, but I'll be back before dusk." And humming a tune as he walked down the road, Ewell went to his work.

Mrs Ewell had little household matters to look to upstairs, and soon quitted the room, taking her children with her. Tom had not uttered a word since his father had forced him to give up the pilfered sweetmeat. The little fellow looked sulky and angry at being found out, and deprived of his ill-gotten dainty. He ground his teeth at Arthur Astwood as he passed by his father's friend, the handsome face of the boy expressing mingled fear and dislike. To the eyes of Astwood all the charm was gone from that rosy face, the stamp of an evil, fallen nature marring its childish beauty.

"What a crop of weeds is already springing up in the garden of that young heart!" mused Arthur, when he found himself alone; "and into what a harvest of misery is it likely to ripen! In the space of one short hour how many faults have appeared!

That boy, that young, beautiful boy, who looked to me, when I first saw him, like a golden-haired cherub, has shown in that short space pride, gluttony, irreverence, a bullying, cruel disposition, insolence towards his father, dishonesty, and falsehood. And yet this unhappy child's parents are godly, truth-loving people. I doubt not that they both desire and intend to train up a child in the way in which he should go, that, according to the promise, when he is old he may not depart from it. But *training* is something beyond mere telling and teaching," reflected Arthur, as he sauntered forth into the garden. "When Ewell wished to train that rose-bush, he did not think it enough merely to plant it close to his wall. He was not content with only watering the roots of his plant. No; he *fixed down* the straggling branches; he *pruned off* ungainly shoots; he would let no worm nestle at the roots, no caterpillar crawl over the leaves. Jack took very good care not to leave his rose-bush to wild nature, as he seems to be leaving his child. The plant is, and probably long will be, a source of pleasure to him and his wife; but the child, I cannot but fear, will grow up to be as a thorn in the side to his too indulgent parents."

CHAPTER III.

Subject continued.

ARTHUR, through the rest of the day which he passed in the cottage of Ewell, saw so much of bad tempers unchecked, evil habits encouraged in the children, that his conscience would not let him go to his rest with an easy mind before he had again spoken on the subject to his friend. So when the long August day had come to an end, when Jack had returned from his work, and Jane had taken Tom and Bess upstairs to put them to bed, Arthur, as he sat alone with Ewell, again turned the conversation upon the children. It was easy enough to do this, for there was nothing which Jack liked better to talk about than the little ones who were the pride and delight of his affectionate heart. To praise the children was the sure way to please the father; but Arthur Astwood was bent on giving something not so sweet but far more wholesome than praise.

"I'm glad that I've seen you and your little ones, Ewell," he began; "you and they will often be in my thoughts when I'm far away from the old country, and in the midst of strangers. I hope to see you all here, if it please the Almighty that I should ever come back."

"I hope so with all my heart!" cried Jack. "Perhaps you'll find my boy and girl growing into the man and woman; for you tell me that you are not likely to recross the water for many a long year."

"I hope that I may find them comforts to you and their mother," said Arthur Astwood, who felt some difficulty in saying out what he had in his mind.

"No doubt of it, no doubt of it," cried Jack, who was building his hopes very high, but, as his friend could not help fearing, building them on the sand.

"You know," observed Arthur, "that I have had a good deal to do with children all my life, both in my own family and as a teacher in a school. This makes me the more bold to say a few words on a subject to which I have naturally given much attention and thought. I have noticed, Ewell, as you must have done, that children, as they grow up to manhood, are either the greatest of earthly blessings or the greatest of curses to their parents, and whether they become the one or the other depends much, under Providence, on the way in which they are brought up at home."

"I'm sure of it, Arthur," said Ewell; "and thankful am I, and I speak for Jane as well as myself, that we can keep our children always beside us, and teach them to love what is good."

"And hate what is evil," added Arthur. "Now, my friend, I hope that you will not take amiss what I am going to say, but it seems to me that your Tom has very much his own way in this cottage; he does pretty much just what he pleases."

"Poor little fellow, why should he not?" cried the father. "He'll have enough to cross him in life; let him be merry and happy now, he has all the world's battle before him."

"Let Tom be merry and happy by all means—as gay as the lark," said Arthur; "but neither child nor man is really the happier for being allowed to run riot. You say that your boy has all the world's battle before him; you would not surely send him

into it bound, as it were, hand and foot by the cords of sin, from which, with God's grace and blessing, you could have helped to set him free, to a certain degree, in the days of his childhood? I do not mean, I need scarcely explain, that any mere human being can ever free another either from sin or its punishment; but we have Scripture warrant for believing that the Lord makes use of parental training as a means of grace, and that great responsibility lies with the parent as to what efforts he makes to break from his children the cords of sin."

"Cords of sin! what do you mean?" asked Ewell. The twilight was so dim that Arthur could scarcely distinguish the features of his friend, who sat with his back to the window, but he knew from the tone of Ewell's voice that he was vexed at the word.

"The expression is from the Bible," said Arthur, "*He shall be holden with the cords of his sin*," Prov. v. 22. "Every one, as we all know, Ewell, comes into this world with an evil nature. With some it shows more than with others; but each of us has some besetting sin or other, which grows on us as naturally as weeds grow in the field, moss by the bog, or mould on a damp wall. The very infant in arms will often show temper and passion."

"I grant you that," replied Jack. "My little chap would roar, and kick, and bite with his toothless gums, afore he could speak a word, if he did not get at once what he wanted. He'd a spirit and a temper of his own, had Tom, but I own that I rather liked it; who would mind the passion of a baby?"

"No one would mind it much, if he were always to continue a baby," said Arthur. "But as the child's muscles are *growing* things, as the infant's feeble arms will in time become the strong arms that can wield the sledge-hammer or flail, so we must

not forget that the boy's character grows as well as his body. And the cords of sin are *growing* cords. Humanly speaking, if you begin a child's training early, you can as easily break his bad habits as I can snap this fine thread." Arthur had picked up from the floor a threaded needle with which Jane had been sewing, and the glitter of which in the firelight had attracted his notice. "But suppose," continued the speaker, "that this thread was a *growing* thread, that each year it doubled its strength and thickness, it is clear enough that in twenty years' time it would be no easy matter to break it, and the man that was bound by it would run a poor chance of ever getting free."

"Ay, it would need a long pull, and a strong pull. to snap the cord then," observed Jack, in a careless tone.

"Let us make a little calculation about it," said Arthur, who saw that his friend was by no means aware of the greatness of the increase that would take place in the strength of a cord that twenty times doubled its own thickness. "This fine thread, I should say, would now barely support a half-ounce weight; that is, the weight of a letter that could be sent free through the post by a single stamp."

"One might perhaps hang such a letter by it, but any greater weight would break such a weak little thread as this," observed Jack, who had taken up the cotton laid down on the table by Arthur, and who was now winding it round his own thick brown finger.

"But supposing that the thread could grow at the rate which I mentioned," said his friend, "in the second year it would be able to support the weight of a whole ounce, which is that of a penny, and on the third year the weight of two."

"It would not need much thickness or strength to do that," observed Jack; "as sixteen ounces go to a pound, it would take six whole years to grow strong enough to bear the weight of a one-pound packet of tea."

Arthur was silent for some moments while engaged in doing a little sum in his head. Having ended his calculation, he said, "have you a notion, Jack, what the growing cord would be able to bear in the twentieth year of its doubling?"

"Perhaps that of a boy, or a man," replied Ewell; "but I have not your head for counting: the multiplication table was always a puzzle to me."

"The cord would bear the strain of a weight of *sixteen thousand, three hundred and eighty-four pounds*, or considerably more than seven tons," cried Arthur. "That is to say, you might hang by that cord three large heavy carts, every one of them holding ten full sacks of coal."

"Thirty full coal-sacks, and the carts to boot!" cried Jack, in amazement. "Why, that would not be a cord, but a cable almost as thick as the trunk of a tree!"

"And it would certainly need a long pull, and a strong pull, to break it," said Arthur, with a smile.

"A regiment of dragoons, every horse pulling for dear life, could hardly break such a monstrous cable as that," cried Jack. "Three coal-carts full of coal to hang by it without snapping it! you don't mean to say that this weak bit of thread, only twenty times doubled, would come to such strength and thickness as that!"

"You can take a bit of paper and do the same yourself, and I think you'll find that I am quite right," said Arthur.

"Well, if ever!" muttered Jack to himself.

"And now," said Arthur, earnestly, "let us come back to the point from which we started, that you may see what was my object in making this little calculation. Do not think lightly of the first small, scarcely visible thread of sin which twines itself round the character of your child. Remember, Ewell, that it is in the nature of that kind of thread to *grow*, that every unchecked bad habit gains strength by time. That which you laugh at in the babe, and scarcely notice in the child, may in the man appear as fetters of strength the most fearful—fetters to break which would need a power far beyond any that human beings could command."

"Now, what kind of threads of sin am I specially to set to snapping off my poor little children?" asked Jack, leaning forward, and resting his two broad hands on his knees.

"Disobedience and untruth," was Arthur's reply. "Your children must learn to obey you and their mother at once, without question, murmur, or delay, that they may in later life so obey their heavenly Father. And your children must learn that nothing gives you more pain or makes you more angry than to hear them utter a single word that is not strictly true."

"I don't think that mine ever do," observed Jack, ready to stand up for his own. "Wilful and disobedient they may be, but Bess, bless her heart! can scarcely talk at all, and Tom always says out bluntly enough whatever he thinks."

"Tom flatly denied having taken my chocolate stick, when he had it clenched in his hand," observed Arthur.

"Poor little man, he was afraid of getting into a scrape. You must not be hard upon such a child," said the father.

Arthur was not inclined to be hard, but he could not forbear mentioning two other instances of untruthful speaking in Tom which had come under his notice during the course of that single day.

"Come, come, you take these matters too gravely, much too gravely," said Jack, trying, though with not much success, to hide the annoyance which he felt. "My children are much like other children. They've their faults and their tempers, I won't deny that; but they'll grow out of them in time. I'm not going to make their lives bitter by pulling them up sharp for every hasty word; so let's drop the subject, old fellow, and talk about your prospects and plans as a settler on the other side of the water."

And so the two friends chatted till a late hour, for they knew that this night might be the last which they would spend together upon earth. Nor did Ewell and Arthur Astwood bid each other good night before they had prayed together. Ewell's prayer was short, simple, and earnest. Arthur joined with him heartily in asking a blessing on the children under that roof, but he could not help this thought flitting across his mind—"A farmer should pray for a blessing on his fields, but *he also should weed them.* Providence leaves us to pull up our thistles, and we know that that crop will more than double itself every year if we do but leave it alone."

What warnings are contained in the Word of God against the cruel indulgence of parents who leave the cords of sin to grow stronger and tighter around their children, until, unless delivered as by miracle, they are bound for life as the slaves of Satan! The sons of Eli, who perished by God's righteous judgment, after bringing upon their family ruin and misery, were once but playful little boys. Small and fine at first were the threads of sin upon them,

but these sins grew with their growth, and their father restrained them not. When David bewailed the fearful fate of his beloved, though most wicked son, "Would God that I had died for thee, oh Absalom! my son, my son!" did not deep self-reproach embitter his grief? David, though a pious man, was a weak indulgent father. Of a brother of Absalom, who, like Absalom, perished miserably, it is written in the sacred record, "*His father had not displeased him at any time by saying, Why hast thou done it?*" David may have taught his boys to sing his own sweet psalms; he may have taken them on his knee, and told them of the good Shepherd who had led him into green pastures; but David had let pride and passion grow unchecked in the hearts of his sons, and shame, ruin, and destruction were the portion of those who were bound with the cords of their sins!

CHAPTER IV.

Subject concluded.

TWENTY years and more had rolled away before Arthur Astwood again trod the dusty road leading to that group of seven cottages. He had, in the meantime, travelled much, seen much, enjoyed much, and suffered much. He was a husband and a father, and his children were growing up around him, the joy of his manhood then, and to be the comfort of his age. Deeply thankful was Arthur that not one of them ever disobeyed his word,—not one of them ever uttered a lie; but this he felt was owing to the influence, care, and example of their excellent mother, far more than to his own. She had prayed for them, and prayed with them,—she had taught them never lightly to pass over the smallest sin, nor to dare to lay down their heads upon their pillows at night with an evil deed unconfessed, or a wrong unforgiven.

There is much pleasure in returning to the dear old country after a twenty years' absence, yet it must be a pleasure not unmingled with pain, for what changes must time, in the meanwhile, have wrought? We cannot hope to find all our friends where we left them. The hand which we grasped twenty years back may be cold in the grave, and the kind voice which bade us "God speed" be no longer able to utter a "welcome."

Such thoughts as these would arise in the mind of Arthur Astwood as he approached the seven cot-

tages on the right hand of the road which he had seen on his former visit. Perhaps it was partly the altered look of the outer world which put sad fancies into his brain. Instead of the clear sunshine of August which had brightened his first visit to Ewell, a dull grey pall seemed to be spread over the sky; the clouds pressing down the air made it feel heavy and close; the position of the sun was only marked by a whitish blot. The summer had not been a fine one, the autumn was dreary and cold, and the leaves were falling fast.

The heart of Arthur misgave him as he came near enough to the seven cottages to distinguish the little differences between them. He looked at the centre cottage; there were no roses on the wall; the rose-tree was there, but withered, and some of its dry leafless sprays hung loose; the nails which had fixed them had fallen out, and no one had cared to replace them. The garden was untidy, and overgrown with chickweed and nettles. Arthur noticed, as he raised his eyes to the cottage, that on the roof some tiles were wanting, and that two panes in one of the windows were broken; one had a bit of newspaper pasted behind, the other hole was stuffed with a bit of old stocking.

"That was never Jack's way of mending a window, nor of keeping a garden," thought Arthur; "I shall find that he's gone; I hope he's not dead!" and seeing the cottage door ajar, Arthur, as he swung back the garden gate, called out, "Pray does Mrs Ewell live here?"

The question was answered by a little bustling woman who came out from the cottage, and who certainly bore not the slightest resemblance to the neat and comely Jane. The woman's cap was dirty, her hair hanging loose, her dress torn and her fingers

stained with the juice of blackberries, which she was probably engaged in preserving. Arthur bade her good-day, and with some anxiety repeated his question.

"Oh! dear no, the Ewells don't bide here," replied the woman, pushing back her hair, and, in so doing leaving the mark of her blackened fingers on her forehead. "They've gone to the cottage which you can just see yonder, at the end of that lane."

It was a relief to Arthur to hear that reply. "Both Ewell and his wife are then living, and I hope well?" he enquired.

"Oh! they're alive, and well enough," answered the woman; "but they didn't care to bide in this here cottage after Bess married and went away."

"The little one married!" said Arthur, smiling, as he recalled to mind the pretty child toddling about with the blue-bead necklace round her small neck, and red shoes on her plump tiny feet.

"Little un, d'ye call her?" laughed the woman; "why, she was taller than me by the head, and a mighty fine girl her parents thought her. But she'd a will of her own, had Bess; and let the Ewells say what they might against the match, nothing would please her but marrying a soldier going to India,—a bit of a scamp—so it was said—and given to drink. However that might be, Jack and his wife couldn't abide the match, and took it mighty to heart."

"Why did they not prevent it?" asked Arthur.

"Prevent it!" replied the woman, shrugging her shoulders, with a broad grin at the question; "Bess Ewell never minded the word of father or mother when she was a little toddle; it warn't like as she would mind it when she was a growed woman. So she had her own way, had Bess, and 'twill be a case of 'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' or my name is not Poll Perkins!"

"I am sorry that my friends have had this sad trouble," said Arthur; "I hope that their boy, their Tom, is a comfort."

"Comfort! bless you!" cried the talkative Poll, again shrugging her shoulders. "D'ye call it a comfort to have a great, strong fellow loafing about at the publics, drinking and smoking his pipe, eating the bread as his father earns, and paying him back in bad language? You may call that a comfort if you like, but keep me from such comforts."

"You do not mean to say that Tom Ewell leads a life of idleness?" said Arthur.

"Oh! he's had place after place, might have done well, as well as any lad in the country," replied Mrs Perkins. "Ye see, the father is so well known and respected hereabouts by gentry and all, that his son had a better chance than other folks' sons of making his way in the world. Why, he was taken as groom at the Hall—a better place no lad could desire. But Tom got into a sad scrape there," continued Mrs Perkins, lowering her voice; "he warn't over steady, ye see, and there was something wrong about the bill for the corn for the horses. Folk said that if the Squire had not winked at the matter, Tom might have been had up afore the magistrate. I thought that poor Jack would never have held up his head again; and Mrs Ewell, she took to her bed for days! They couldn't take such a thing easy, ye see, they being always respectable and good-living folk themselves, and so proud of the lad! It was just a heart-break to them when Tom got into disgrace. But you know it was no fault of theirs."

Arthur Astwood could not have answered that he knew this. He remembered too well the stolen sweets, the bold lie, the insolent look and the blow which a curly-headed child of four years old had

given to his father, almost unreproved, and quite unpunished! It was in the nature of things that unbroken habits should strengthen with time, that the cords of sin should grow.

"Then, you see," continued the gossip, "Tom is mighty fond of a drop at the public, and sometimes—and that pretty often—he gets a drop too much, and—but there are these brats at the blackberries!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs Perkins; "I'll give it to you—I will!" she screamed out to some children within the cottage, as she darted back into her dwelling. Arthur heard the sound of two sharp slaps, and then a dismal crying and sobbing, and turned away from the gate with the thought, "There are two ways of ruining the tempers of children. It would be hard to say whether most misery is produced, for parents and children, by harshness or by over-indulgence."

Astwood now proceeded down the lane towards the cottage now occupied by the Ewells. It was not nearly as pleasant-looking a dwelling as the former one had been. There was no garden in front, the door opened right on the road. There were, indeed, two pots of flowers in one of the windows, but they were a poor exchange for the clusters of blooming roses that had half-hidden the wall of the former home of the Ewells. The door of the cottage was open, and Arthur could see that Jack and his wife were seated at dinner. The moment that Ewell caught sight of his friend, he started up with a look of joyful recognition, and cried, "Ha! that's my old pal, Arthur Astwood!"

"So you knew me at once, after twenty years' absence?" said Arthur, as he heartily wrung the hands of Jack Ewell and his wife.

"Knew you, old fellow! I should think so! I'd

have known ye half a mile off!" exclaimed Jack, his manly face beaming with pleasure.

"I don't think you're much changed, Mr Astwood," observed Mrs Ewell; "only a good deal more sunburnt, and a little bald," she added, as Arthur took off his hat and seated himself on the chair which was placed for him at the table.

Arthur could not certainly have said so much for his friends. Time, or rather, perhaps, the sorrows which time had brought, had made a sad change in both of the Ewells, who had been such a comely pair. Jack's fine powerful frame looked gaunt and bony; there were lines of wrinkles on his forehead and down his face, and both his eyebrows and whiskers showed now more of grey than of brown. But the change was yet more marked in his wife. The bright cheerful young mother, whom Arthur had seen on his former visit, had become, in appearance, an elderly woman. Jane's figure looked shrunken, her back was bowed, and all the fresh roses had gone from her cheeks. Had he casually met her elsewhere, Arthur Astwood would not have recognised Jane Ewell again!

But the poor mother had still a pleasant smile with which to welcome her husband's friend; and Jack, in the enjoyment of the unexpected meeting, seemed to forget all his cares. Conversation flowed pleasantly on—Arthur noticed, indeed, that the Ewells rather avoided the subject of their children; but when there was a passing mention of Bess and her husband, there was not a word of complaint uttered by either parent. The foolish, wilful girl was spoken of as "our dear child" still.

Dinner was nearly finished, when Jack said, glancing at the clock, "Tom don't seem to be coming in after all; I suppose that he's gone to London."

This was the first time, since he had entered the cottage, that Arthur had heard the name of the son from the lips of either father or mother.

"I'm afraid that he has," said Jane, gravely: "he said yesterday that he would go, and as he never came home last night, no doubt he went up by the train."

"I told him not to go to London," said Ewell, with an air of vexation. "I know well enough the kind of folk that he sorts with there, and as for his talk about trying for work"——

"Many people find work in London," observed Mrs Ewell meekly, with a glance into her husband's face, which seemed to say, "let's hope the best for our boy."

"I forbade him to go," repeated Jack; "but I might have known by this time," he muttered, "that I might just as well have spoken to the winds. I don't know where the lad got the cash for the journey, his last shilling was thrown away at the"——

"Now, my dear, have we no news to give Mr Astwood in exchange for all he has been telling us about foreign parts?" interrupted poor Jane, evidently anxious to turn the conversation from the ill deeds of her graceless son.

"News—we're not like to have much of news in this quiet corner," observed Jack; "it's them as crosses the water, like Arthur there, as get something to talk of besides calves, and crops, and such-like country matters. But I have one bit of news," added Jack, with a smile, "which, mayhap, will surprise ye, Arthur. This last year I've taken to be a prudent, saving man."

"Well, that is something new," said Arthur; "you were never one to run into debt, but you were never given to saving."

"I was a young man when you knew me, Arthur, and I thought as how youth and health would last for ever, or rather, I never troubled my head with thinking whether they would last or not. But things look different to me now, and I'm not the man that I was. I often says to myself, says I, if any thing were to happen to me, what would become of Jane? She hasn't strength to earn her living, and it ain't as if there was any one I could look to work for her, and support her when I am gone." The father's tone was very sad, as he uttered the last words; he could not, he dared not, leave his widow to the care of their worthless son.

"I hope that it may please the Lord that we may go together, Jack," said Mrs Ewell; "your life is as good as mine."

"There's only One as knows which of us will be called first," replied her husband; "but it's the business of the bread-winner, I take it, to see that he don't leave a good wife to want. So," added Ewell, more cheerfully, "there's not a week as passes, save just in the winter when coals are dear, that I don't put by something out of my wages for Jane."

"Into a benefit-club, I suppose?" observed Arthur.

"No, no," replied Jack, shaking his head; "since the manager of one we had hereabouts went off one fine night with the money, I've determined to have nought to do with them clubs. Besides, I like to see my money. I keep the shillings in that same fancy-teapot which you gave us, Arthur, on the day of our wedding—a mighty pretty little bit of china it is; I call it our bank, and it don't break, which is more than can be said of some others."

"No, there is not a chip or a crack in it," chimed in Jane.

"So when I've shillings enough in my teapot, I

turn them into gold," resumed Jack; "and as I drop in the yellow bit, I says to myself, 'There's many a good strong cup of tea will come out of that one day for my missus,'" and the husband's careworn, weather-beaten face relaxed into an expression of tender affection as he looked upon her who for so many years had shared his joys and his sorrows. Jane met his glance by one of such grateful, trustful love, as gave to her faded features something better than beauty.

"I've four sovereigns laid up there already," said Jack, "and there will be two more to keep them company afore the year is over. Just you get out that teapot, Jane, and let Arthur see what care we've taken of his present."

"With pleasure," said Jane, rising from her seat, and going up to a neat little cabinet of oak, which fitted into one of the corners of the room. Her hand dived into her pocket, and remained fumbling there for more than a minute.

"What are you searching after, wife?" asked Jack.

"The key," replied Jane, pulling out pincushion, nutmeg-grater, thimble, and divers other things. It seemed to Arthur as if the contents of that pocket would never come to an end.

"Ah! where's my head?" cried the good woman at last; "I gave Tom the key yesterday; he wanted to get out his flute. Oh! Mr Arthur, if you knew how sweetly he used to play upon it; but he has not touched it for years!"

"Tom must have forgotten the key, and have carried it away with him," said Jack.

"It's a bit inconvenient," said Jane, as she put back into her pocket the various things which she had drawn out. "The baker calls to be paid to-day

and the money for him I locked up in the little cabinet."

"What's to be done?" cried Jack; "it was mighty careless of Tom to go off with the key."

"We mustn't expect old heads on young shoulders, my dear," said the mother.

It was but a sorry excuse; Jane looked as if she knew it to be so, and Jack sighed a weary sigh.

"Maybe I can help you out of your difficulty with the key," observed Arthur, "as I chance to have my large bunch with me. Out of a dozen one may suit your lock."

"No harm in trying," said Ewell.

Sure enough the third key that was tried fitted; the lock did not turn easily indeed, but it turned, and the cabinet was opened.

"Well done, Arthur, that's not the first difficulty you've helped me out of!" cried Jack. "You've the key to some things as are harder to open than that cabinet, I take it."

"Here's the money that I set ready for the baker," said Jane, "and here's the pretty teapot," she added, as she handed the little piece of china to Ewell.

"And here are my four sovereigns in it," said Jack, and he took off the lid. Arthur was startled at the expression of sudden blank amazement, followed by one of pain, almost of horror, which came over the face of Ewell as he looked within.

"He's not left a farthing—he's taken all!" cried the father, almost dropping the china from his grasp; for the strong bony fingers were trembling as if with palsy.

Jane ran to the cabinet, and rapidly searched every corner, but searched in vain. The poor mother was probably seeking as hopelessly for some possible excuse for her son, for some way of accounting for

the loss of her little store without disgracing her Tom. At least so it seemed to Arthur, for Mrs Ewell turned round with the word "perhaps,"—but what she had meant to say she could not utter; the sentence died on her lips; and with something that sounded like a stifled sob, the poor mother suddenly rushed out of the room. Arthur was sure that she was weeping bitterly upstairs, but he did not see her again during the time of his visit.

Ewell did not make the same effort to hide his grief from the friend of his youth. The father leant his arms on the table, and bowed down his head upon them, ashamed to show his face. Arthur shrank from breaking the painful silence which followed; there was indeed a David sorrowing over a lost son!

Ewell was the first to speak; raising his head with a heavy sigh, he murmured, "It's not the money—it's not the money—I'd rather have lived on a crust—or starved—than that it should ever have come to this! Oh! Arthur Astwood," continued Ewell, turning his haggard face towards his companion, "you warned me, but I would not take heed. *The cords of sin*, they've grown and they've strengthened, and now—now—man has no power to break them!"

"But God has—with Him all things are possible!" cried Arthur.

Ewell mournfully shook his head, not as denying the truth of this, but to show that he could not at that moment receive comfort even from words of Scripture. He did not speak again for several minutes; his thoughts may have been wandering back to the days when with such proud delight he had looked at his beautiful boy, and expected that he would become the staff and support of his age.

"We had another little one after you had left England," said Ewell at last, speaking slowly, and

leaning his brow on his hand. "The baby twined himself close round our hearts, and when it pleased the Lord to take him, and the little coffin was laid in the churchyard, Jane and I—we thought it hard to part with him—hard to say, 'Thy will be done.' He's happy now, the little cherub; he'll never know sorrow nor sin. 'Twas sore grief to lose our baby, but nothing, nothing to this!"

"While there's life there's hope," said Arthur, anxious to give what comfort he might to the parent almost heart-broken.

"What hope?" replied Ewell, gloomily: "he will not dare show himself again here; and in the wide world of London how should we find him? No; he'll go from bad to worse; the cords are growing, growing; we can do nothing now for the lad'"

"Except pray for him," said Arthur.

"If we'd only watched as well as prayed," muttered Ewell, "'twould never have come to this."

Arthur Astwood rose to depart. In that dwelling of sorrow he now felt his presence like an intrusion. Very sadly he turned from the door of a man who had once appeared to be one of the happiest husbands and fathers upon the face of the earth. As he slowly walked up the lane, very fervently did Arthur pray for his own dear children, that they might be kept from evil, and, by the power of grace, delivered from the growing

CORDS OF SIN.

CHAPTER V.

Weakness and Harshness.

"OH, GRANDAD! I don't like your story at all!" exclaimed my little Katie; then she added, correcting herself, and gently stroking my knee as a kind of apology, "I mean that I can't bear the way in which it ends. I hoped that you would have told us that Tom came running back to the cottage, and gave back all the money, and said that he was sorry, very sorry, for having grieved his parents so, and that they all were quite happy at last."

"I should hardly have read to you so sad a story my Birdie," said I, "if I had not intended to write a sequel—that is, a second part to the tale. I hope to let you hear it next week."

"My objection to your story is this," said Anne, speaking in her quick, decided manner from her high-backed chair, like a judge summing up evidence. I own that I have a little awe for Anne, and always listen with attention whenever she gives an opinion, having a great respect for her sound common sense, though I could wish that she did not force it upon one like physic, without taking the trouble to sweeten it. "My objection to your story is this," she repeated; "you would make folk think that there is no danger in bringing up children but that of over-indulging them, and letting their faults go unpunished. Now, I say that there is just as much danger in hunting and nagging them, finding fault at every turn, and frightening them into falsehood.

It's my belief that just as much mischief comes of harshness as of weakness in bringing up children."

"I know I never could lay a finger on my Kate," said honest Charley; "nor could you, father, for the matter of that."

Katie was fondling my hand, and looked up into my face with a smile, which seemed to say, "I'm not a bit afraid of my grandad."

"I would never be harsh to any one, especially to a helpless child," I observed. "I would have parents begin gentle training so early that, God helping them, there should never be need to use the rod."

"You would break the little, little cords when they were no thicker than spiders' threads," cried Kate. "I don't think that father had ever any at all."

Charley laughed, and shook his head at his Birdie.

"Do you suppose," observed Anne, "that Poll Perkins' children, stormed at and struck, were likely to grow up more dutiful than those of Jane Ewell?"

"No," I replied to the question. "Children who are merely ruled by fear are treated like the horse and the mule, held in by bit and bridle, and when, as they grow up, bit and bridle are taken away, there's nothing else by which to hold them, and they are likely enough to run wild, and get into all kinds of mischief."

"I've seen that happen often," said Anne.

"It seems to me, but I may be wrong," observed Charley, speaking in his slow, rather hesitating way, "that to try to kick and cuff faults out of a child is like ploughing up a field of young wheat as the shortest way of getting rid of the weeds."

"Both with the field and the child we need pains and patience," said Anne, who, to do her justice, has always shown good judgment in her management of

Kate: (but Kate is one of those sweet-tempered children that seem as if a daisy-chain would be bridle enough for them.) Anne would doubtless have held the rein with a much tighter hand had she been the mother of Tom Ewell.

"Little ones are neither to be looked upon as toys nor as slaves," I observed. "A parent should say to himself, 'This child I have received *from* God, to bring up *for* God; and that I may do so rightly I need to ask wisdom from above.' As for our treatment of children, the Almighty has deigned to call Himself our Father, and to teach us by His dealings with ourselves what a father should be. He delights to make his children happy; He loads them with gifts; but He will not suffer them to go on in sin. The Lord corrects and chastises, if needs be, but in perfect wisdom and love. If we act towards our children with wisdom and love, we have done our part towards weeding the field, and then, with prayer for God's grace, may look and hope for a glorious harvest."

"No parent should ever strike when in a passion," said Anne.

"Nor strike at all, I should say," observed Charley, "save for a grave sin, such as a falsehood. I'd have no mercy on that."

"When St Peter told falsehoods three times over, he was punished only by a *look*," said my Kate.

"For that look was enough, my darling," I replied. "That tender, forgiving look of his Lord gave Peter power to burst the cords of his sin, as Samson burst the green withes that bound him. We feel sure that Peter—penitent, loving Peter—never uttered such falsehoods again. Happy the home, blessed the parents, where the children, governed by love, can be restrained by a look; where they are more

afraid of giving pain to a father's heart than of receiving pain from his hand! Happy the home where the little ones, by word and example, are brought up in the faith and love of God, and hatred of sin! Such homes are nurseries for heaven; and though, as time passes, its inmates may be scattered abroad, and all, one after another, find graves—perhaps, far apart in this world—yet they will have one bright meeting-place ever before them.

"'And when the Lord returns to reign,
They all shall glorious rise,
And form one family again,
Unbroken, in the skies.'"

CHAPTER VI.

The Cord of Love.

My little Kate was very impatient all the week to know the end of "that dreadful Tom Ewell," and whether he were not put into prison and beaten, and made to give back the money which he had so wickedly taken. I have often noticed that a sense of justice is usually strong in children. I could not help smiling at the observation made by Birdie, as on last Sunday evening she took her place, as before, on her little low chair, drawn close to my knee.

"I hope that the policeman caught that horrid Tom Ewell, and that the judge had him flogged—flogged—flogged!" The bright little face of Katie looked almost fierce as she repeated the word each time with stronger emphasis, and she slapped her left hand with her right, to give greater force to her speech.

"Why, Birdie," cried Charley, bursting out laughing, "I should never na' guessed that you would have been for thrashing any poor fellow after such a fashion as that!"

"It would want a deal of thrashing to break cords as thick as a tree," said the child, gravely turning her blue eyes on her father, as if rather surprised at his laughing. "If Jack Ewell had begun when they were like spiders' threads, he could almost have kissed them away; but when they had gone on growing for twenty years, oh, dear! I don't know that *any* beating would break them!"

"I don't think that any amount of beating would do so," observed Anne. "Punishment is often good as a preventive, but mere punishment can never make a change in the heart."

"No, never," said Charley, earnestly.

"There is but one thing that can change the heart," I observed, "and that is the grace of God's Spirit. Mere fear, mere suffering, never yet converted a soul. Pharaoh was chastised again and again, and again and again seemed to repent of his sin; but he returned to it once more as soon as his terrors were relieved, as a strong branch, drawn aside by main force, swings violently back into its former place as soon as that force is removed."

"Then there is no hope, none at all, for those who have gone a great, great way on the bad path?" said Katie, sadly; "no hope for those who are bound very, very tightly with the cords of their sins?"

"There is a power which can deliver even the greatest sinner," I replied. "There is an influence which can, and which does, draw many a poor wanderer back from the path of destruction. The story which I am going to read to you," I continued, as I opened my book of Cords, "was told me by a poor lame cobbler, who lived not far from my home in London. He used to help, like myself, to teach a ragged class on Sunday evenings, and, when the teaching was over, would sometimes come home with me to share my simple meal, and let us have a little conversation upon religious subjects together. He is a poor and pious man, very desirous to serve his great Master as far as his time and means will allow; grateful for every mercy, and always deeming the least of his blessings far beyond his deserts."

Katie looked a little disappointed. "I thought that you were going to finish the story of Tom

Ewell," she said; "I should like to have done with that first, before you begin the story of your friend, the lame cobbler."

"It is possible that we may clap the two stories into one," I replied, "or rather that you may find that the lame cobbler knew better than any one else, and could tell better than any one else,

The History of Tom Ewell.

There is perhaps in all the Bible no story which goes more straight to my heart than that of the woman who loved much, because she had been forgiven much. The larger the debt, the more wondrous the love that could pay it all, and let the poor debtor go free. Perhaps the loudest songs of praise will be sung in Heaven by some prodigals like myself, who, when they might have expected to have the door of mercy shut for ever against them, found mercy, forgiveness, and welcome.

I own with shame that I had been from my boyhood a grief and disgrace to the best of parents, from whom I had never had a rough word. In vain they tried to start me in life, so that I might earn my bread as an honest lad should. My conduct was so bad that I lost every place that I entered; I was too careless, indeed, to make an effort to keep one, for I knew that I could always fall back on my father's kindness, and live on the fruit of what he earned by the sweat of his brow. I chose companions that he disapproved, I idled away my time playing at skittles on the village green, or at cards in the public-houses. It gives me many a pang now to remember all the grief which I caused my parents. We may repent of the past, we may be forgiven for the past, but alas! we can never recall the past, or give back to

our parents the years which our evil conduct embittered. I often feel as if I would give worlds, if I had them, to live over again the years which I spent under the roof of my father

I had robbed my parents of their peace, their comfort; I blush to confess that I robbed them at last of their savings. Far as I had gone in evil, it gave even my hardened conscience a twinge when I thrust into my pocket four sovereigns, wrapt up in a morsel of paper, which my parents had kept as a little store for a time of need. I had done many things that were wrong, but had never before committed such a heinous crime as this. But even for a deed so black Satan could whisper excuses.

"I'm only *borrowing* it," I muttered to myself, as I slunk away from our cottage. "When I've made my way in the world I'll pay it back, every penny, and clap another pound on the top of these to make it all square. Father was not going to spend the money, but to keep it for what he calls a rainy day; I shall merely keep it for him, instead of leaving it in the old teapot, and when the rainy day comes, why, I'll be ready with the tin."

However hard I might try to give a sop to quiet conscience by such wretched excuses as these, I knew that I dare never again look in the face of my father, or of any one else in our village, till I brought back the money again. I did not wish to change one of the sovereigns till I got up to London, and as I had no other cash with me but an odd shilling which I had borrowed, and a few pence twisted up in a bit of newspaper, I made up my mind to walk the whole distance.

I trudged along at a quick pace; not so much because the day was cold and the wind keen, as because of my anxiety to lose sight as soon as I

could of everything that could remind me of home. I turned away my face as I passed the old church. The clock struck four at the moment, and I almost started; it seemed to my fancy like the voice of a friend calling me back. How often I had sat on a bench in that church when I was a child, between my father and mother, reading out of the same hymn-book with them, and singing aloud, for I was always fond of music; and the singing was all that I cared for then in the service. I began singing now, but certainly it was not a hymn that I sang, nor anything like it. 'Twas a jovial drinking song that I shouted out to drive away thought, and make myself fancy that I was happy.

I hurried onwards until evening began to close in. I had gone a good many miles, and being now tired I sat down to rest on a low stone wall which divided a churchyard from the high road which led towards London. I was not singing now, nor had I a mind to sing. I could not help thinking how my father and mother would look when they found out what their Tom had done. I did all that I could to put away the thought, but it would come back; perhaps the place, and the hour, and the quiet of everything round me, helped to make me more dull and low. The wind through the yews in the churchyard seemed to sigh as I had never heard it sigh before.

Presently I heard another sound, not many yards off, on the other side of the wall on which I was seated,—'twas the sound of a child's sobbing. I leant over, and looked to see where it came from. A little girl, in black, was sitting beside a low mound on which the grass had not yet had time to grow. Her back was against the wall, so that I could not see her face, nor could she see me from the place where she sat. She sobbed softly, as if her little heart was too full to keep in its sorrow, and I could

just catch the words between her sobs, "She was a kind mother to me."

Down I jumped from my seat on the wall; I could not stop longer, that child's sobs and words so knocked on my heart. She could not have had a better mother than mine. I could not help thinking that a day might come when I too might lose the being who loved me best upon earth, and that then my misery would be a thousand-fold greater than the child's, for that remorse would gnaw into my conscience for ever.

"I can't stand this!" I cried, half aloud; "I'll return, it is not yet too late. I'll put those sovereigns back into the old teapot before there's been time for father to miss them. Bad I have been, bad I may be, but I can't, won't break the heart of my mother!"

I turned back, and walked—perhaps quarter of a mile—on my return to my home. It was about the hour when my parents always prayed and read the Bible together before they went to their rest. If fathers and mothers wish to keep the hearts of their children, or win them back if they chance to stray, let them give them such holy memories of home as my parents had given me. The very recollection of the Bible and the prayer (I knew that my name was always in that prayer) was almost enough on that night to make me turn back from my evil course, and to save me from all the sufferings which I have had to endure.

But, unhappily, I had not gone far before I saw the lights glaring from the windows of a public-house on the road. To me, tired as I was in body, restless and wretched in mind, the attraction of such a place was what I could not withstand. Even now I never trust myself within the door of a public, nor let a drop of spirits cross my lips, for a man once given

to drinking will find temptation to excess too strong for him, unless he altogether abstain. I turned in, it was too natural to do so, and soon changed my shilling into gin, and my remorse and tenderness towards my mother into utter recklessness and disregard of anything except my own pleasure. It was not with a very steady step, or a very clear head, that I left the public, and once more turned my face towards London. I had swallowed down with the spirits every good thought that had entered into my mind.

Being almost as fond of smoking as of drinking, I took out my pipe and filled it. "I'll warm myself," thought I, "in this chilly raw evening; there's nothing beguiles a long weary way like a pipe." Then I remembered that I had no match with me, and I was just about to turn back to the public-house for a light, when a ragged little boy came and offered me some boxes of matches for sale. "Only a penny," said he. I was in a reckless humour, or rather, perhaps, my head was in too muddled a state for me to care for the trouble of counting half-pence. I pulled out of the pocket of my jacket what I thought to be the packet of coppers, gave them with a swaggering air to the boy, and was soon again on my way, with my lighted pipe in my mouth, trudging through the chilling white mist that was gathering around.

I had not, however, taken many steps forward when an uneasy doubt crossed my mind. I thrust my hand again into my pocket, to feel if my packet of sovereigns was safe. There was something like coin wrapped up in a scrap of paper; I pulled it forth, but my misgivings were not removed. There was not much light indeed, but enough to let me distinguish between one kind of money and another;

and if the night had been black as pitch, my tongue would have told me in a moment the difference between copper and gold! I snatched my pipe from my lips, I flung it over the hedge, I was in such a storm of rage that I scarcely knew what I was doing. Stamping on the ground, I cried out, I fear with an oath and a curse, "Here's nothing but beggarly halfpence; that little wretch has made off with my gold!"

I did not stop to reflect that my own guilt was greater far than the boy's, or that it was just that I should lose by my carelessness what I had gained by my crime. There was only one thought then in my brain,—to pursue the boy who had sold me the matches, seize him by the throat, half shake the life out of him, and force him to return to me the money which I had given to him by mistake. The shock of losing it seemed to have partly sobered me, for I remember turning and rapidly retracing my steps, and almost immediately catching sight through the mist and gloom of the ragged boy whom I sought.

I shouted after him,—I threatened,—I do not know whether this was the first thing which informed the boy of the blunder which I had made; but he instantly took to his heels, running as if a mad dog were behind him, then suddenly turned aside, scrambled through a hedge that bordered the road, and was out of sight in a moment!

My blood was up,—I was resolved that the little rogue should not escape me. I reckon it a mercy that I did not come up with him then, or I might have killed the lad in my blind fury. I was soon over the hedge and after him, tearing along at my utmost speed over meadow—brambles—palings—I knew not, I cared not whither, so that I could but clutch the boy of whose figure I every now and then caught a glimpse through the deepening gloom. I noticed

little of what was around me, only caring to scramble over this, or force myself through that, if an obstacle came in my way. I have only an indistinct notion that I was rushing at last across some place that seemed like a yard at the back of a dwelling when my wild chase was suddenly brought to a close. I had not seen that an open well lay in my path, and before I could utter so much as a cry, I was over the edge—and down, splash—into the water!

CHAPTER VII.

Subject continued.

It may be said that all that had happened had been by mere accident; that a man might indulge a thousand times in hard drinking without exchanging his gold for a little smoke, and that he might rush on to the end of his days in a course of sin without plunging into a well. This is true enough, and yet it has always seemed to me as if the events of that evening were as pictures of what must happen to every stubborn transgressor. *Every* drunkard is exchanging that which is more precious than mines of gold for a short passing pleasure, which is as the smoke which vanishes away; and *every* sinner who perseveres in his reckless course *must* find it end in a fearful plunge down into that bottomless pit from which there is no escape!

I was thoroughly sobered as well as frightened by my sudden splash into cold water, and I was a good deal bruised by my fall, for the well was rather a deep one. I had no means of climbing out of my narrow prison, and the prospect of passing all the night there, up to my waist in icy cold water, with not a dry stitch about me, was enough to put the loss of the money out of my head. I shouted loudly and long to bring somebody to my help, and I had presently the satisfaction of hearing voices above, which told that my cries had not been unheeded.

"I say, Mary, who can that be a-shouting so?"

"Some idle fellow who has been drinking," was

the reply, uttered in a careless way, which seemed to say, "The shouting is something with which we have no manner of concern."

"Help! help!" I called out, as loudly as I could, "I have fallen down into the well!"

I do not know whether the meaning of my words could be made out, coming as they did from that deep hollow place, which seemed to muffle up my voice; but, at any rate, the women above must have understood where I cried from, and what must have happened, for the first speaker exclaimed, "Why, Mary, a poor fellow must have fallen down into our well! I'll run and tell master directly."

"What was a man doing in our yard at this hour, I should like to know," grumbled the second voice, to which there was no reply; but there appeared to be a good deal of movement going on above, a calling for "William! William!" and I felt sure that it would not be long before I should be lifted out of my dark, cold, watery cell.

I experienced no remorse at that time—nothing but impatience to get out, and anger at what I thought a cruel delay in releasing a poor fellow from such a painful position. Presently I could distinguish two male voices, as well as those of the women, speaking in the yard, and I judged from their tones that one of the voices must be that of the master, the other that of the man. I saw also the gleam of lights, which faintly lit up the brickwork round the top of the well, and the pulley by which those above were beginning to let down the rope. I was glad to hear the creaking of the windlass, as the rope came quickly down, and more glad still when I could lay hold of it, and grasp it tightly with both my wet, cold hands.

The rope was, as I have said, let down quickly,

but the drawing it up again was a very different matter. I was, like my father, a tall, strongly-built man, and no light weight to draw out of a well. The handle of the windlass must have moved very slowly indeed; there was hard breathing above, and, I doubt not, hard straining also, for again and again the master's voice spoke encouragement to his servant, while he himself, as I afterwards heard, pulled as if for dear life. If my weight strained the muscles of those who were turning the windlass, it also strained the old rope, which had never been intended to bear so heavy a weight. I had almost reached the top of the well, my aching arms were all but within reach of stretched out hands, when the rope gave way, and down again—with a loud cry—I plunged into the water.

The second fall was far worse than the first had been. The one had but shaken, frightened, and bruised me; the other had injured my back, and broken the bone of my leg. The agony of that moment I can never, never forget! I could not stand upright in the well. it tortured me to support myself so against its sides as to keep my head above water, and prevent actual suffocation. I could not speak,—I could only moan—and then, indeed, came the terrible thought that all this was a judgment for sin, and that the Almighty was requiting me for being such a base, undutiful son.

"Oh! where shall we get a rope?"

"Look in the barn—in the barn."

"There's one, I'm sure, in the loft."

"Quick, quick; don't you hear how he groans." All these mingled exclamations, or such as these, came to my ear like sounds in a dream. There was confusion and rushing to and fro, and every minute of suspense seemed to me like an age. At last per-

sons were evidently engaged in fastening another rope to the chain above. How slow they appeared to be in their work, how terribly slow, for I was like one on the rack.

Then the end of the second rope was thrown down and I caught it, but with something akin to despair I felt how thin it was, how unfit, as it seemed, for the purpose to which it was put. It would only, I thought, serve to cut my hands if I grasped it. I knew that I could not now manage to hold on till I should be raised to the top, and the rope was not long enough, I found, to be tied in a loop round my waist.

"It won't do," I cried out with a terrible effort.

"It won't do," echoed several voices above, amongst them one softer and sweeter than any that I had heard before; it was that of the lady of the house.

"What's to be done?" cried the master; "we are not on board ship where a coil of rope can be had at every turn."

Anxiety and distress were expressed in his tone; but what could the master's feelings be compared with mine! The water around me felt cold as ice; my teeth chattered as if I were in a fit of ague; I was getting so numbed that I knew that my strength could not hold out much longer.

There was a little pause, and then the lady cried out eagerly, "There's the long crimson cord that was sent from London for our bell-ropes."

"That's long and strong," cried the master, "but—"

I did not hear the end of the sentence, indeed I could hear nothing at all but a rushing, droning sound in my ears. I was growing dizzy and faint. I do not think that I even prayed, though surely no being in the world had more need of prayer than I; but great pain sometimes takes away all power of praying. Had I then been called to my last account.

I might have died without so much as crying out, "God be merciful unto me a sinner!"

There was mercy for me, however, though I asked not for it, mercy both from man and from Him whom I had so greatly offended.

At length the third cord came down! It actually swung against my face, and I grasped it, but my numbed fingers could not retain their hold. I remember that the rope felt much softer and thicker than the last, and the thought crossed my mind even then that such a rope as that was never made to draw anything out of a well. There seemed to be a loop in it also, but I was in such a state of exhaustion that I could not raise my arms to put it over my head and the upper part of my body. I looked upwards, it was a look of despair, for it seemed as if I must perish after all. I just remember seeing the round bit of dark sky at the top of the well broken, as it were, by the figure of some one leaning over the side, and there was the red light of a torch gleaming on a face full of anxiety and pity. That was the last thing which I can recollect observing before I swooned. I was conscious of nothing more till I found myself in a warm, dry bed, with people around me chafing my limbs.

But I was told afterwards of all that happened when it was found that I was unable even to put the looped rope around me, that I was so utterly helpless as not to have strength to make the smallest effort to save my own life.

"The rope dangles loosely,—the poor fellow must have fainted away," cried the master. "Hold the torch well over the brink to throw what light it may down the well. I will descend myself and do what I can; it seems that the man himself can do nothing."

So on that dark and most bitter cold night the

"The master remained shivering down in the well, until the poor thief was drawn up, delivered from darkness and death."—p. 67.

master, a gentleman and an officer, one as much above me in station as he was in everything else, clambered down the rope and into the water, in which he found me almost dead, for my head had dropped on my chest, and, shallow as it was, the water, under such circumstances, was quite deep enough to drown me. The master raised my head, and supported it on his own bosom, till, with great difficulty, he had managed to pass the loop of the rope under my arms, I helpless as a log all the time, he up to his waist in the water. Then he cried out to those above to pull hard; but the united strength of William and the women could not turn the windlass while the weight of two men was suspended to the rope. The master instantly quitted his hold, and remained shivering down in the well, until the poor thief whom he had saved was drawn up, delivered from darkness and death.

For the next twenty-four hours—or thereabouts—I lay in a terrible state. The surgeon came and set my poor leg. I was in great pain of body, and yet greater anguish of mind. My senses wandered much; I had strange and terrible dreams, rushing after some one whom I never could reach, and then falling down—down—down—into some dreadful bottomless gulf. And my waking thoughts were almost worse than my dreams. I would not for any amount of earthly gain live over again those awful twenty-four hours. But my misery was *not* repentance. It was nothing but pain and terror, it was not sorrow for sin. I do believe that, could I have been perfectly healed at that time, I would have returned to my evil courses, my bad habits, my wicked companions, just as bad, or rather much worse, than I had been ever before! Mere fear and agony have of themselves no power to draw a soul out of sin.

CHAPTER VIII.

Subject continued.

My kind benefactors must have taken considerable trouble to find out to whom I belonged, for there was nothing on my person by which I could be traced to our village, and I was now a good many miles from my parents' home. But the night after that in which I had been drawn out of the well (so I afterwards heard, for I took no note of time), my friends were made aware of the dangerous state in which I lay. When I opened my eyes after one of my feverish snatches of sleep, they fell on my mother watching by the bedside of her most unworthy son!

How pale and weary she looked, but there was such tender love in her eyes, I seemed to read in them at once that all was forgiven. I need not dwell on my confused recollections of that terrible time. Day after day, night after night, that fond mother watched beside me, beat up my pillows, bathed my forehead, put lotions to my bruises, poured out my draughts, and did all that mortal could do to soothe my sufferings. Now I saw her moving softly across the room to draw the curtain and shut out the light that distressed me—now sitting for hours beside me, so still that I should have thought her sleeping, only that she heard in a moment the faintest whisper when anything was wanted, or guessed the request before my lips had time to speak it.

My poor father came to see me once. As the bread-winner he could not do more; a man cannot

toil from dawn till sunset and watch through the night besides, nor often walk five-and-twenty miles after a long day's work. But that one visit from my father I shall never forget. There was something in his tender manner as he leant over the bed and said so sadly, "My poor boy!" which cut me to the heart more than any reproaches could have done. I wondered whether my parents could yet know of my last wicked deed. I could not help saying, "Father, your four sovereigns are gone."

"Let them go," he answered, "since you, my boy, are saved."

These few words, and his way of saying them, went to my soul. I hated myself then as I never had done before. I felt that I must be a worthless wretch indeed to have wronged such a father as that, and that all the pain which I suffered was nothing to what my conduct had deserved. I thought this, but I could not speak it, I could not even say what the Prodigal said to his father, such a choking sensation rose in my throat. But it seemed to me, somehow, as if my father guessed what was passing in my mind, for he looked at my mother with such a thankful look, like one who has had a weight lifted off his heart, and she turned aside to hide her tears. It was the first time that I had seen my mother cry since she had come to that place to nurse me.

It is wonderful what power there is sometimes to be found in a single word. That word *saved* which my father had used set me thinking, and long after he had left me I was turning it over and over again in my mind. *Saved*, am I *saved?* I knew that I was saved from drowning, and the doctor had said that, with care, I should get at least partly over the effects of my fall; it was not of my body, it was of my soul that I was thinking then. WHAT SHALL I DO

TO BE SAVED? I knew that question is in the Bible, but I could not remember who put it, nor what was the answer given, and the trying to find that out made me wakeful all through the night.

The next morning the master of the house in which I was lying came to see me, the master to whom I owed my life. He kindly asked how I had slept, noticed that my mother's eyes looked heavy (as well they might, for she had not closed them night after night), and he sent her away to take some rest, saying that he himself would sit and watch for awhile. I had wished to thank the master for drawing me out of the well, but when I had seen him before I never could find the words. Now when he and I were alone together, I managed to say a little of what I felt; and added, for it was as if something forced me to add it, "I'm afraid, sir, you'd hardly have done what you did, had you known how unworthy I am of your goodness."

He quietly looked me in the face with those calm, kind eyes, whose gaze gave one such a feeling of confidence and trust. "I do not know your past history, my friend, nor do I wish to know it," said the master. "Your worthiness or unworthiness had nothing to do with my duty in helping a fellow-creature in distress. It is to free mercy that I myself owe everything."

"There's a wonderful difference between you and me, sir," said I.

"In the sight of our Creator we have both been poor sinners," he replied. "We *all* need to ask the great question, WHAT SHALL I DO TO BE SAVED? and there is but one answer to that question, whether it be put by one who stands high in man's respect, or by one whom he deems an outcast."

I suppose that there was something in my face

that showed the master that I either did not quite understand, or quite agree with what he had said, for he asked me whether I did not know what was the answer to that all-important question, as given by the Apostle St Paul.

"I ought to know," I stammered out; "I used to go to school, and to church, too, when I was a boy, and I've often heard the Bible read by my father; but I have not attended to it as, I own, I ought to have done."

The master rose and went to the table on which lay my mother's little Bible. While he did so, I thought to myself how singular it was that he should happen to speak to me about the very words which had been running in my head all the night—WHAT SHALL I DO TO BE SAVED?

Perhaps this was the reason why I listened so attentively to the master's reading, or perhaps it was because he gave such force and expression to every verse that he read. I never now go over that most interesting 16th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles without remembering that morning, and calling to mind how ever and anon the master would stop in his reading, half close the book, and speak to me words that came from his heart; I am sure of that, for they went straight to mine.

"Here is the account of Paul and Silas," he said, "when they were thrust into prison, in danger of death, their feet set fast in the stocks, their backs bleeding from the scourge; and yet we find them not only praying, but praising; not only enduring, but even rejoicing, in sore tribulation." Then the master went on with the account of the earthquake which shook the prison, the earthquake which came like God's answer to prayer. And then the master read of the terror of the jailor, when he drew his

sword to kill himself, fearing that his charges had escaped, and how he came trembling before his own prisoners, and in the terrors of an awakened conscience, cried out, "What must I do to be saved?"

"Now, my friend," said the master, laying the Bible on his knee, and seeming to read my soul instead of the book, he looked so earnestly at me; "had the account of what happened closed here, had we been told of the jailor's question, but not of St Paul's reply, how we should have longed to know what answer was given by the Apostle! The jailor asked what he should do to be saved. Now, salvation is what we all need—what we all desire. No earthly knowledge is to be for a moment compared in value to the knowledge of how we may be saved from God's wrath, from the fearful punishment of sin, from eternal misery hereafter. Well may we repeat the momentous question uttered in the Philippi prison—What shall man, what shall *you* and *I* do to be saved?"

The master paused for several moments as if to give me time to think over the immense importance of the subject on which he had entered. I did not utter a word. I knew that *my* soul at least was in danger, but I knew not then how it could be saved.

"Here is the answer," continued the master, raising the Bible again, though he did not need to read it, for he knew the answer by heart. "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED."

"But surely then, sir," said I, "almost every man and woman here in Britain will be saved, be they bad or good, for all—at least most of us believe that the Lord Jesus suffered and died."

"That bare belief is not saving faith," answered the master; "the devils believe so much, and tremble.

The jailor, probably, believed so much, long before he was troubled with an anxious thought as to how his soul should be saved.

"But what is *saving faith*, then?" I inquired. "Simply trust in God's Word, which tells us that Christ paid our debt for sin in His blood, and that He is willing as well as able to save to the uttermost you, me—all that believe in that wondrous proof of His love."

"That sounds simple and easy enough," said I. "But is a man saved only because he believes all this, if he goes on in wilful sin?"

"He *cannot* go on in wilful sin if he truly believes all this," cried the master. "True faith in the love of Christ must make a change in the heart into which it is deeply received. *We love Him*, we cannot help loving, when we are certain that *He first loved us*, and loving, we cannot but seek to please Him. Look at the story of the jailor, see how his *faith* was shown by his works! What was he *before* he believed? A cruel man who showed no pity for his bleeding innocent captives, who thrust them into the innermost prison, making their feet fast in the stocks. What was he as soon as he believed?" Again the master read from the Bible. *He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his straightway.* "Was it a light matter," asked the master, glancing up from the page, "was it a light matter for a government officer in a heathen city to be baptized, he and all his family? Was not such an act likely to bring upon him loss of situation, loss of friends, a storm of persecution, trial, poverty, perhaps even the death of a martyr? Why did the cruel man become kind, why did one who had most probably been an idolater openly confess a crucified

Lord? why, but because he *believed* in the mercy and love of Christ, and that love of Christ constrained the jailor to live, and to be ready to die for Him who had freely forgiven and saved him."

Neither the master nor I spoke again for some time. He closed the Bible, rose, and put it back on the table, then returned to his seat by my bedside.

"I think, sir, that I understand you," said I to the master at last. "I've had much teaching since I was a child, but I'm afraid that it has profited me little. When our rector has preached about salvation, and sanctification, and such-like words, they have been to me like names without any meaning, or words spoken in some foreign language; they reached my ear, they went no farther."

"Is their meaning clear to you now?" asked the master.

As I did not answer at once, he said in a solemn, earnest manner,

"To come to Christ is—salvation,
To follow Christ is—sanctification,
To be with Christ is—glory!"

And then falling on his knees beside my bed, the master prayed as I never had heard any one pray before, that God's Holy Spirit might be given to us, to lead us to the crucified Lord as our only hope of salvation, and help us so to follow Him here as to be with Him in glory for ever!

After that talk with the master, I lay for hours very still, so still that when my mother came back she thought that I must be sleeping. I was not sleeping, but thinking. My soul had laid hold of a blessed truth, my faith was grasping a wondrous hope; it was that the Lord, who died for sinners, *could* love, and *did* love even a wretch like me! I scarcely could have believed it had I not seen in

His servants such love as gave me a glimpse, as it were, of his own. There were my own good parents, who had watched over me, and cared for me, from the time that I first lay in their arms, a helpless babe, able to do nothing but wail. What a base return had I made for all their kindness and care! I had grieved and disappointed them, I had brought them sorrow and shame, and yet they had never cast me off; they had prayed for me, hoped for me, cared for me still! Was not this wonderful love?

And there was the master, blessings be upon him! who, for one who had no claim whatever on his kindness, had done all that he could have done for his dearest friend or his brother! Here, again, was wonderful Christian love! But such was as nothing compared to the love which brought the Lord of Glory from Heaven to suffer for those who had deserved only punishment at His hands! Had not my whole life been one act of rebellion against my Creator, had I not broken His laws, neglected His Word, forgotten His presence, turned away from His call! and yet He had not given me up, yet He was willing to welcome me still!

Thoughts of the judgment to come had filled my soul with terror; I had felt that I would do anything to be able to fly the presence of a just God; but as soon as I had hope in His love, then I was drawn towards Him; I wished to fly no longer, rather did I long to draw nearer and nearer, to be with my merciful Saviour, to serve, obey, and love Him, and to prove, by the whole future course of my life, how grateful a poor wanderer was for His free and most unmerited mercy.

CHAPTER IX.

Subject continued.

THOUGH I had much bodily pain to endure before I was sufficiently recovered to be moved with safety from the home of my kind preserver, I do not look back on the weeks spent on a sick-bed as a time of misery, after the conversation held on that day with the master. Nor was it, I think, a miserable time to my mother. She used to look so happy when I asked her to read the Bible, or to pray by the side of my bed. It is written that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; when I repented of my sins, I am sure that there was joy with those who loved me on earth. It was such a restful thought to me,—a thought which made me able to believe what would otherwise have seemed too good news to be true, "God has forgiven me as freely as my earthly father has forgiven; and loves me with a love greater even than that of my mother!"

At last I was able to return to my home. The master, my kind benefactor, sent me in an easy carriage of his own, that I might suffer no harm from the journey. My dear mother sat beside me, holding my hand all the way. How I felt as I passed our old church! I did not now turn away my head; no, I looked at the grey stone porch and the ivy-covered tower, and the churchyard with the tombstones and the yews. There was white rime on the grass on the mounds, and edging each leaf on the trees. How thankful I was that I might again enter

that church, though but as a poor sickly cripple,—for I knew well enough that I should never be a strong man again.

Father was at the door of our cottage to welcome me home. He half-carried me out of the carriage, and into the cottage, and placed me gently in his own arm-chair, the only arm-chair in the place. My father looked sad to see his son such a wreck of what he had been, and my mother's eyes were not dry, but she could smile through her tears.

We had not been long together before I told my father of what I had been turning over and over in my mind during the latter part of my illness.

"Father," said I, "I shall never again be fit for field work, nor for going into service. The doctor has told me plainly that I am a cripple for life."

"I'm afraid so, dear boy," replied my father, with a heavy sigh. I believe that he would have taken my lameness, and given me his strength, could he possibly have made the exchange.

"So I must try some other way of getting my living," said I. "What think you, father, of my taking to cobbling?"

"I don't think that's much in your line, Tom," said my father, shaking his head with a smile. "I should be sorry, leastways, to have no boots to wear but of your mending."

"There would be no harm in Tom's trying what he could do," observed my mother, who had talked over the matter with me before.

"No harm whatever; but Tom knows that, as long as I can earn a crust of bread, we'll share it together," said my father.

I could see that my father did not expect me to make much by my cobbling, and he was right enough when he said that the work was not in my line. I had

always disliked what I called "sit-still drudgery," and had said a hundred times over that I'd never care for any work that could not be done either under a stable-roof or the sky. My habit of doing nothing but what I liked to do was terribly against me in setting to learn a trade; and almost as much so was my habit of tiring soon, even of what I did like at first, and of throwing it up in disgust. Had I learned submission, and patience, and steady perseverance when I was a child, they would have been better to me than a fortune. As it was, when I really wished to work hard, I was like a carpenter without tools, or tools made of metal that bent like pasteboard. I cannot describe the struggle which it cost me to learn the first part of my trade. I often and often felt inclined to drop the awl in despair, throw the wax into the fire, and the packthread out of the window. I should certainly have soon given up the task, which, to one so wayward and wilful as I had been from childhood, seemed worse than labour at the treadmill, had I not had a strong motive indeed to make me stick to my work. A lash at my back would scarcely have made me toil on steadily; but the desire not to be a burden upon the best of parents did much more than a lash. I wanted to requite their love; I wanted to show them that I was grateful; I wanted to be some credit to them at last. And so I worked and prayed—prayed at my work, and over my work; and at length, though very slowly, got through difficulties which had been like iron gates bolted and barred in my way.

But it was worth any labour to see my father's face when I brought to him my first piece of finished work: it was a shoe for a child.

"That's something like a shoe," he exclaimed! as he held it in his hand, and looked at it with pleasure

and pride, as he might have done at a beautiful picture, turning it round and carefully examining every part. It was better than a beautiful picture to him, for it was a proof that his once idle, good-for-nothing son cared enough for his parents now to labour hard for their sakes, and to break through strong habits of laziness that had grown upon him since childhood. The making of a shoe may seem a trifle not worth the mention; but from the trouble which it had cost me, and the pleasure which it gave to my parents, I count the hour when I finished that first shoe as one of the happiest that I have ever known in my life.

Is it not thus with the work which we do for our Father in heaven? It is not the worth of the thing itself, but the grateful love which prompts the attempt, and which makes us persevere in our labour, whether we be fresh or weary, whether we like or dislike that work which has been given us to do, which makes it honourable to us and acceptable to the Lord.

I am thankful that my dear father did not leave this world for a better before he knew that his son would be able to earn enough not only to support himself, but his widowed parent. I fancy that I can feel now the feeble pressure of his hand as he spoke what were almost his last words—"I die in peace; not a trouble on my mind: Tom, you will take care of your mother!"

CHAPTER X.

Subject concluded.

HERE closes the simple story of Tom Ewell. I have related it pretty nearly as I heard it from his lips as we sat together, on a Sunday evening, chatting over the fire, after having, as usual, taught at a Bible-class. I had heard parts of the tale before, but had never had such a full, connected account of his accident, the events which had preceded it, and the results that had followed. I could have added to the story myself; I could have told how, for many years, Tom had faithfully fulfilled the charge left to him by his father on his deathbed. He had been to his widowed mother son and daughter in one; comforting her in her sorrow, tending her in her sickness, supplying all her wants, working early and late to support her. When I looked on the pale, pleasant face of the cripple, as he sat with his feet on the fender, and his hands clasped round his knee, gazing into the fire, while thoughts of old days came over his mind, I felt what a miracle of grace it must have needed to change a proud, wilful, worthless prodigal, into such an earnest worker, such a true-hearted Christian, such a tender, dutiful son! If Tom Ewell could have regained suddenly the perfect use of his limbs, and, like the cripple of whom we read in the Bible, have gone walking, leaping, and praising God in the full enjoyment of health and strength, such a miracle would have been far less wondrous than that of which I was now a witness.

The history of Tom Ewell's past life naturally led to an exchange of thought between us on the subject of trials as a means of conversion.

"The world would say," I observed, "that it was a grievous misfortune to you to have such a terrible accident as that which you have described—an accident which made you, in the very prime of your manhood, a cripple for life. How do you now yourself look upon so painful a trial?"

Ewell still gazed into the fire as he replied, in a slow, deliberate manner, which expressed the deep conviction of his soul, "I look upon that painful trial now as the greatest of mercies. Had I had my own way, had I gone up to London with my ill-gotten gold in my pocket, I should no doubt have speedily plunged into every kind of vice. That accident was probably the means of saving me from ending my days in a hospital or a prison, or perhaps" —Tom dropped his voice as he uttered the last words—"perhaps on the gallows! Not that it was the mere accident that saved me," added Ewell, looking up, and speaking with more animation; "I might have had every bone in my body smashed without its doing the slightest good to my soul; but my accident brought me into a state of fear and danger which made me feel the need of salvation. It tied me down to a sickbed, kept me from bad companions, and gave me time to ponder over the past. It made me know myself to be helpless and wretched, and love, love and grace, did the rest."

"Yes, my friend," I observed, "the whole story seems to me like a parable. What happened to your body is a kind of picture of what happened to your soul."

"How do you make that out?" asked Tom Ewell, unclasping his hands from his knee, and turning his

chair a little, so as half to face me where I sat. I have a natural love for teaching by parables, and often take pleasure in tracing out deep meanings under the surface of the common events of life.

"I think that you will admit," said I, "that your rushing on in mist and darkness, and then plunging suddenly into a well, may be taken as a type of any poor sinner hurrying on in a godless career, and falling deep into sin."

"This is the state of all men by nature," said Ewell, who, since he had taken to teaching others, had studied the doctrines of our faith more deeply than might have been expected from a man toiling for daily bread.

"And you will admit," I continued, "that for you or for any one else to remain in that deep pit of sin must sooner or later bring death, the eternal death of the soul."

"*The wages of sin is death,*" said the cripple; "we have God's own word for that."

"Then comes the question, How are we to get out of a state of sin and of danger? and here especially your story seems a parable to me."

"I own that I don't see it," observed Tom.

"There was the *first rope*, the motive of *duty*," said I. "A child brought up in a Christian land—above all, one brought up in a Christian home, knows that it is his *duty* to fear God, and keep the commandments, to leave off sinning, and try to live an honest and virtuous life. But the mere motive of a sense of duty is not strong enough to lift us above the power of temptation. It breaks, and we fall more miserably than do the poor heathens who have never had a Bible to teach them their duty to God and to man."

"Right—you're right there," observed Tom Ewell.

"They that know their Lord's will, and do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; that also is written in the Word."

"Then came the *second* rope," I went on, "which was, I should say, like the motive of *fear*. You have told me of your terror of coming judgment, your dread of the wrath of God. But that fear was not enough to draw you out of the depths into which you had fallen. You owned yourself that had you been healed at once, notwithstanding your fears, you would have returned to your wicked course, and been as far from salvation as ever."

"Probably farther," remarked my companion. "We read of one who, *when he heard of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come*, trembled; but though he trembled he did not repent. If the jailor's fears, and *only* his fears had been worked on, he would never have been the rejoicing as well as believing Christian who, as we cannot doubt, kept true to the end, and died in the faith."

"And now we come to the *third* motive, the *only* motive strong enough to lift us out of the pit of sin and misery into which we by nature have fallen," said I. "This is the motive of *love*, love towards Him who first loved us, towards Him who suffered for us, towards Him who, at the cost of his own life's blood, hath purchased salvation for sinners."

"How is it that we can so long remain cold and dead, heartless and wicked, with such a motive before us?" exclaimed Tom Ewell. "Look, for instance, at me," he continued, speaking fast, and with strong emotion. "I had heard of my Lord's sufferings from the time that I was a child on my mother's knee; but the solemn account was to me as a mere tale, it never went to my heart. It did not make me deny myself one ungodly pleasure, it did not

make me give up one sin. I did not hear of the way of salvation for the first time—no, nor for the hundredth time, when my preserver came and read the Bible, and spoke and prayed by my bedside."

"No," I replied, when my companion paused; "and here again your story appears in the light of a parable to me. Though the strong cord let down to you actually touched you as you were drowning in the well, as you told me yourself, you had no power to grasp it. It might be strong, but you were weak; it might be quite sufficient to raise you, but you were unable to lay hold on it, and still less to keep hold of it. You would have perished, with the means of safety close by, had not another, one stronger than yourself, come to your aid. Faith that saves is the gift of God, love that delivers is the work of His Spirit. The motive that stirs us, indeed, that raises us from our fallen condition, that lifts us up from sin to light and holiness, to happiness and glory, the efficacy of that motive is a proof that the arm of mercy has been around us, and that our heavenly Master has sought us out in misery to draw us unto Himself."

Tom Ewell made no direct reply to what had been said; but taking from his bosom a little Testament which he always carried with him to the Sunday class, he read, in a low, earnest tone, part of two beautiful verses from the fifth chapter of St Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians:—"*The love of Christ constraineth us. . . . that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them.*"

"That," said I, "is the Christian's motive, the source of the Christian's strength; it is that holy, constraining love which makes him forsake sin, rejoice even in tribulation, and steadily labour for God,

not as a terrified slave, but as an obedient child. When the ransomed of the Lord meet above, where all is light and gladness, and talk together of the means by which they overcame the world, and reached the heavenly mansions, it will be found that love towards Him who loved them was what prevailed over that love of self which belongs to our fallen nature. In whatever other things the saints may have differed, in this one thing they have been alike—they have been drawn out of sin, and raised towards heaven, by the

GOLDEN CORD OF LOVE.

CHAPTER XI.

Make Hay while the Sun Shines.

A VISITOR at Beechwood farm, especially during the winter, is nearly as rare a creature as a black swan; but black swans, though rare, do exist; and on the second Monday in the New Year there came to our quiet little nest a visitor who, since fine feathers make fine birds, should count as a black swan at the least. I had known that my daughter-in-law's niece, Carry Keith, was coming to pass a day at the farm, as her mistress was on a visit to a friend at a house but three miles off, and had given her young maid leave to come over and visit her aunt. But when Rover's barking made me look out of the window, and I saw a fine lady, as it seemed to me, coming through the green gate, I forgot all about Carry Keith. Daintily she walked, holding up her flounced black silk dress, either that it should not drag on the snow, or to show off her worked petticoat, or the high-heeled boots which she wore. On the head of the damsel was a pork-pie hat with a feather, and she carried herself with a jaunty air, as if quite aware that any one must take her for a Squire's daughter at the least.

"Who can this be?" cried I.

My exclamation made Anne come up to the window by which I was sitting.

"Why, it is Carry, to be sure!" cried Anne. "She is coming it mighty grand. I wonder how such a fine lady ever found her way to the farm;"

and so saying Anne went to the door to meet her niece, and soon returned to the parlour, accompanied by Carry Keith.

For all her silk and her feather, when she came in and sat down beside us, with her pleasant good-humoured face and kind unaffected manner, I thought Carry Keith as nice a young maiden as I had seen for a long while. There was nothing grand about her but her clothes, nothing flaunting but her feather, and the glittering ornaments that dangled from her ears. Carry was ready to be pleased with everything, would not hear of depriving me of my arm-chair, which, of course, I offered to the guest, and stooped, with ready kindness, to pick up my spectacle-case, when I chanced to drop it on the floor.

Looking at Carry's nice bright face, after she had taken off her hat and shawl, and listening to her pleasant talk, I had half-forgotten her grandeur of attire, when I was reminded of it by the manner of my son Charley, when he came in for dinner. Charley always wipes his boots on the mat before venturing into the parlour—his wife makes a point about that; but when on this occasion he caught sight of the finely-dressed damsel within, he scraped them over again, and passed his brown hand over his hair to smoothe it, and looked shy as he came into the room, as if he were not quite sure whether his wife's niece might not take it amiss if he should shake her by the hand. Carry, however, soon put him out of all doubts on the question, and by the time that the mutton had been placed on the table in the kitchen, we were as easy and sociable a party of four as ever sat down to a comfortable meal, with cheerful faces, and I hope with thankful hearts.

Charley is a quiet, silent man; unless the conver-

sation turn upon crops, or sheep-farming, his voice is not much heard, but he is fond of a little fun. I saw his eye twinkle every time that he glanced at what he afterwards called "the brown dumpling," which Carry wore on the top of her head. As for our sober, sensible Anne, I felt certain, from the expression of her mouth, that before dinner was over she would give Carry what she called "a bit of her mind" on the subject of dress.

"My dear, you're so fond of giving people a bit of your mind, that it's a wonder that you've so much of it left for your own use," Charley had once observed to his wife. He has a high idea of Anne's good sense and judgment, and so has every one else, including herself.

As soon as we had finished our plum-pudding, Anne's expected sally was made.

"I remember an old saying," she observed, "that there are three things which a woman should and should not resemble. She should be like a church clock, keeping time; but not like a church clock to be heard all over the town. She should be like an echo, answering when spoken to; but not like an echo, always to have the last word. She should be like a snail, keeping at home; but not like a snail, *to carry all her fortune on her back.*" Anne looked very meaningly at the silk dress and gold ear-rings of her niece, as she added, "Now, Carry, don't you follow the snail?"

Carry burst into a very merry laugh at the last words. Certainly anything that looked less like a snail than the lively young girl could scarcely be imagined. "Ah! aunt," she exclaimed, "you are always pulling me up sharp!"

"This is rather a case of pulling down flat," muttered Charley.

"What wages do you get?" inquired Anne abruptly.

"Sixteen pounds a-year, and everything found," replied Carry.

"Very good wages, indeed," observed Anne. "In my day such could only be looked for after many long years of hard service, and you're but a child of twenty."

"I assure you, aunt, I find it hard enough to make both ends meet," said Carry.

"I daresay that you do," observed Anne, rather drily, "if you dress in flounced silk like a lady. What had you when you first entered service? I am sure that the curate's wife could not have afforded to give high wages."

"I had only eight pounds," replied Carry, with a little shrug of the shoulders.

"And you managed to dress upon that," remarked Anne.

"If you can call it dressing," laughed Carry. "I looked like——"

"Like a very neat, tidy little maid, for I saw you," interrupted her aunt. "To my mind you looked to the full as well in your checked print and little round cap, as in hat and feather and flounced silk dress, with your hair tied up in a lump on the top of your head."

"Tastes differ," observed Carry, with perfect good humour. "I choose to dress like the rest of the world; I beg or borrow from no one, and I may surely spend the money which I earn in the way that pleases myself."

"Yes, it's a pleasure to you now to wear fine clothes," said Anne; "and doubtless it will be a great pleasure to you to remember the silk and the feather, worked petticoat, and all, when in your old

age you creep about some workhouse, clad in the plain striped gown of a pauper."

"Aunt! what do you mean?" exclaimed Carry, opening wide her eyes in surprise.

"That's what fine dressing is likely to bring you to," observed Anne. "It is to such an ending of life that it brings hundreds and thousands of servants. They have good wages, and they spend them; they go on as if they thought that youth and health and strength would last for ever. All their wants are supplied in the present; they live on the fat of the land, and don't give a thought to the future. Then sickness comes on them suddenly, or age creeps on them slowly, sight goes, or strength fails, and after a painful struggle to keep their heads above water, the poor creatures give in at last, and go down and settle into pauperism for the rest of their days."

Carry's young face grew grave. She could not but own that there was truth in the words of her aunt, for, as she mentioned afterwards, she had visited a poorhouse with her first mistress, and knew that many of its aged inmates had once been servants filling comfortable places.

"Now, for my own part," continued Anne, "if I were a servant, I should feel more easy in a plain stuff gown with the thought, 'when I'm sixty, I shall have my twenty pounds a-year as long as I live, enjoying in age what I worked for in youth,' than I should feel in the daintiest of dresses, knowing that I must die in a workhouse at last."

"So should I," observed Charley.

"Perhaps so should I," said Carry, gaily—"that is to say, of course, if the stuff-dress were of a good fit, and a pretty colour. But how can one make sure of twenty pounds a-year from the age of sixty to the end of one's life?"

"By buying a 'Government deferred life annuity,'" replied Anne, who keeps a "table of premiums" in her blotting-book, and pores over the columns of numbers in it whenever she has five minutes to spare. "You have but to pay into the post-office three pounds a-year until you are sixty, and after sixty your paying stops, and your annuity begins, and your twenty pounds per annum, in half-yearly payments, is as sure as the Bank of England itself can make it."

"Oh! but fancy going on paying, paying for *forty* years," exclaimed Carry, holding up her hands. "I shall put off my prudent laying-by till I'm at least twenty-five years of age. Perhaps I'll be wiser by that time," she added, with a playful glance at her uncle.

"If you do not begin paying till you are twenty five years old, you will have more to pay," said matter-of-fact Anne, rising, and going for her tables. "Here, I have put a mark at the place," she continued, on her return with the well-studied papers in her hand. "Those who begin to make their payments at the age of—

25, must give each year	£3	15	0
At 30, " "	4	15	0
At 35, " "	6	3	4

To ensure for themselves an annuity of twenty pounds after they reach the age of sixty."*

Carry smiled and shook her head at hearing how her payments must increase in amount according to delay in beginning to make them. "I have often

* Copies of the Tables for the grant of these GOVERNMENT ANNUITIES, and also for the Insurance of Lives, may be had *gratis* and *post-free*, on application by letter to *the Secretary of the General Post-Office, St Martin's-le-Grand, London.* The postage of such applications need not be paid.

thought," she said, "of putting something into the Post-office Savings Bank. The cook at our house has done so for years, and has fifty pounds ready whenever she wants them. Would it not be better for me to do as the cook has done than to buy—what do you call it?—a deferred Government annuity?"

"No, Carry, in your case I don't think that it would be better," replied Anne; "and I'll tell you my reason for saying so. Suppose that, by laying by two or three pounds whenever you could spare them, you found yourself at the age of sixty with fifty, or say a hundred pounds of your own."

"I should think myself a rich old dame," said Carry, gaily, "and should snap my fingers at the workhouse."

Anne gave rather a grim smile at the words of her merry young niece. "So you might for a time, Carry," she observed. "A hundred pounds might last you, if you were careful and managed well, let us say for five years, which would bring up your age to sixty-five. But suppose now that you should chance to be a hale, hearty, old woman, (your grandmother lived till eighty, and her father to eighty-seven,) it would not cheer you much to see your money gradually dwindling away to nothing. It would be sad if, when your friends, on your birthday, wished you many happy returns of the day, to think, if you did not say it aloud, 'Oh! pray don't wish me that! it would never do for my life to last longer than my money!'"

"While if you had a Government annuity," remarked Charley, "you would know that you would have twenty pounds a-year sure, even if you should live to a hundred."

"And I should secure this annuity by paying

three pounds a-year from this time?" observed Carry, in a tone of reflection. "But oh, dear! three pounds is a good large slice out of a servant's wages. When one is but twenty years old, grey hairs and old age seem to be a million miles off!"

"But every day brings them nearer," said Anne, "except, of course, to those who die early."

"And I might die early!" cried Carry, quickly, "and never live to enjoy this twenty pounds a year: or I might fall sick before I was twenty, and have to leave service at once. One can't put off these troubles to any particular age. Or suppose now, that after I had gone on paying three pounds a year for ten years, I should take a fancy to emigrate, and go off to New Zealand for instance,——"

"Or to marry, and set up a nice little business," said Charley.

"I'd wish that I had not thrown away thirty pounds in fishing for a Government annuity," cried Carry.

"The money would not be lost," observed Anne; "on the contrary, you could draw it out again, every penny, and you would have your thirty pounds safe in your pocket, to pay for your passage out to New Zealand, or any other thing you might fancy. I have been supposing all along that you choose to purchase a Government annuity at MONEY RECOVERABLE rates. Were the money to be NOT RECOVERABLE you would have to pay but two pounds, three shillings, and fourpence every year, instead of three pounds, to ensure you twenty pounds per annum after the age of sixty."

"Oh! but I should like to have the money RECOVERABLE, most decidedly!" exclaimed Carry. "I've no notion of being obliged to wait till I'm sixty years old before I can touch a farthing. And

suppose that I should die *before* I was sixty, would the Government quietly pocket all my poor little savings?"

"If you subscribe at the RECOVERABLE rate, three pounds yearly, your friends would have back the money," replied Anne; "if at the NOT RECOVERABLE rate, of course the savings would not be restored."

"Now, let me see that I have it all clear," cried Carry, 'for I've never had much of a head for business. If I go to a post-office now, and say, 'I'm twenty years old, and want to have twenty pounds a year when I'm sixty;' I must give one, two, three pounds every year till then, to ensure this snug little pension?"

"All right," answered Anne, nodding her head. "You must produce a certificate of birth or of baptism, of course, to prove that your age is really what you state."

"Lest they should put you down for forty instead of twenty," observed Charley.

"But if at any time I should change my mind, and want to have my money back," asked Carry, "would the Government not hold it tight, but honestly give me back every farthing that I had put in?"

Again Anne nodded her head. "In that case you would, of course, lose all claim to the annuity," she observed.

"You can't eat your cake, and have your cake, you know, Carry," said Charley.

"I really think that I *will* buy a Government deferred annuity," cried Carry. "It would be making hay while the sun shines, laying up in summer for the winter of old age. I've certainly no fancy for dying in the workhouse, and would

not like to be afraid of living to a good old age as my grandmother did. I certainly *could* manage on thirteen pounds a-year, with everything found," she added, more thoughtfully.

"Better, I take it, than on twenty pounds a-year, and nothing found," observed Charley.

"What a pity it was," observed Anne, addressing her husband, "that Jack Ewell, in your father's story, had not spent his sovereigns as he earned them, in buying an annuity for himself or his wife, instead of keeping the cash in a tea-pot! No one then would have been tempted to steal it, and the money would have been, as it were, growing, though not so fast as those bad habits of which we heard in the first story."

Carry turned her smiling face towards me. "There's Mr Astwood sitting so quiet, and not uttering a word," she cried, "though he looks as if he had plenty to say. I wonder what he thinks about this plan of my buying—how grand it sounds! A GOVERNMENT DEFERRED LIFE ANNUITY!"

"I'm sure that he approves," said Anne, with decision.

Charley did not look quite so sure. "What say you, father?" he enquired.

"I say that the plan is full of worldly wisdom," I answered, "and that as far as this life is concerned perhaps nothing could be wiser or better. But I've my own notions about money. I own that I think God's bank safer even than the Bank of England, and I don't care to hear about laying up money in the one, if there's to be nothing laid up in the other."

"Do tell me what you mean, sir?" cried Carry.

There was something so frank and pleasant about the girl, that I felt that I could speak to her as if she were a grandchild of my own.

"There's a verse that we have very often read and heard read," I replied, "that holds in itself more wisdom than all the plans and schemes that man has ever contrived. *He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again.* We know who it was who said, *lay up treasures in heaven.* Now, I believe that we are not forbidden to make provision for old age, and for a servant, receiving regular wages, to buy an annuity is perhaps the very best way of doing this; but we must not forget at the same time that the longest life will not last for ever, and that if our portion be only for this world, death will leave us poor indeed, though we should have a million per annum."

"Father always says that, as the Jews were commanded to give a tenth of all they had for the service of the Lord, Christians cannot do *less*," observed Charley.

"And we always give it," said Anne; "I, for one, never grudge it, for I believe that it brings a blessing on what is left. We never seem a penny the poorer, at least, for what we bestow in charity."

"Not that we can claim any reward or any merit," cried I, "even were we to give away in alms all that we have. But He from whom all good comes is pleased to accept what we offer to His poor for His sake. I like to remember those gracious words, *Ye did it unto Me.*"

"A tenth," repeated Carry, thoughtfully; "that would be thirty-two shillings out of my wages. I could scarcely manage to give all that, and three pounds every year to buy an annuity also."

"It would leave you eleven pounds, eight shillings," observed Anne. "I myself never spend more than ten pounds a-year upon dress."

Carry made no reply to this observation. I thought, as we rose to leave the table, that she shook the crumbs from the folds of her grand new dress with a meditative air. Perhaps the young lady's-maid was balancing in her mind the respective advantages of finery and independence, and asking herself whether the pleasure of dressing like a lady would compensate for the prospect of spending a dreary old age on the parish, with poverty rendered the more bitter by the recollection of former plenty.

Charley invited his wife's niece to go with him over the farm-yard. "There's not much, perhaps, that the like of you will care to see," he observed; "but Anne is proud of her poultry, and we've a short-horn that scarcely can be matched in the county."

Carry accepted the invitation with pleasure; everything seemed to afford her enjoyment. I was amused at the notion of her hat and feather bending over the pig-sty, and her dainty little high-heeled boots pattering across the yard. I wondered how the fine lady's-maid would guard her long flounced dress while she wandered about the farm, where the snow is still lying thick.

Carry returned from her little excursion looking rosy and bright.

"Well, Carry, what have you been doing?" asked Anne, who had remained with me in the parlour, having some linen to sort.

"I have been learning amongst the hay-ricks much the same lesson as that which you taught me at dinner," replied the young maid with a smile. "I have been thinking of the time of merry summer, when the grass of the meadow was gay with daisies and buttercups, and the cattle grazed in rich pastures, and all was sunshine and plenty——"

"And thinking," interrupted Anne, "that it was well that the scythe had mowed down daisies, buttercups, and all, that provision might be made for the winter, which was so surely to come. It is senseless folly to let the present shut out the thought of the future; for the young to act as if they never expected to live to be old. The annuity is as the hay-rick stored up for use in the farmyard, so make hay while the sun shines, Carry, that you may not dread life's winter at last."

CHAPTER XII.

Saving and Spending.

I AM not sorry that I noted down yesterday the conversation which passed between Anne and her niece. There are many faults worse than improvidence; covetousness and selfishness are amongst them; yet improvidence brings with it such a train of sufferings and wants, that it seems to be an act of Christian duty to warn the young and the thoughtless against it. I would, indeed, rather be the means of saving one poor fellow-creature from crime than a hundred from mere poverty; the workhouse may be a nursery for Heaven, and is different indeed from a prison; yet still it would rejoice me to think that amongst the many thousands of those now earning good wages in Britain, one out of ten is making sure of an honest independence to be enjoyed in the evening of life.

During the summer, when I was able to walk over the fields and visit the cottagers, many a time have I spoken to labouring men about deferred Government annuities. The comfort of a provision for old age was set against the dangerous pleasure of the pot-house.

I remember going up to a fine strong lad, who was sitting in a hay-field, leaning against the wheel of a wain which he had been helping to load, while he ate his bread and cheese, and took deep draughts from his can of beer. I sat down on a hay-cock near him, and began to converse with the youth.

Joe's mother is a decent, tidy widow, one respected by all her neighbours, and I had often visited her cottage. I knew that she had but one great care on her mind; her Joe was a good son, an industrious hard-working labourer, an honest upright young man, but he was too fond of finding his way to the "Blue Bucket," at the other side of the green. Several times, after work in the hay-field, or at the harvest-home, Joe had come to his mother's cottage the worse for liquor. With him it was clear that drunkenness and improvidence went hand in hand; and that to induce him to save his money, might be to help to save his character, and health, and all that makes an Englishman respected and happy.

After a little talk about the weather and wages, I came to the matter that I had on my mind, as Butler, landlord of the "Blue Bucket," chanced to drive along the lane near us in the little dog-cart which he had lately set up.

"Joe," I enquired, "how much of your hard earned wages has gone to set that dog-cart rolling?"

Joe grinned, shrugged his shoulders, and rubbed his chin.

"How much of your wages have you dropped into yonder 'Blue Bucket,' never to see a penny of your money again?"

"I'd my money's worth for my money," answered Joe.

"I suppose that two shillings a-week would scarcely pay your score at that public-house," I observed.

"Hardly, I take it," replied Joe, grinning again.

"Now just let me tell you, my friend, what eight shillings a month, spent in buying a Government annuity, would bring a man when he reached the age of sixty," said I. "Let us fix upon that age,

because though many are hale and hearty at it, still they have had a long day of work, and may well look forward to a little rest by that time."

"A working man has had the best of his strength taken out of him afore he gets to sixty," observed Joe; "if ever I gets to that age, I shall look out for—for——"

"For a berth at the work-house?" I asked.

Poor Joe's countenance fell. "I hopes as how I'll never come to that," he muttered.

"You may make sure (as sure as poor mortals can be of anything here) that you will never come to it, Joe," I replied, "if, instead of sinking your good money in the 'Blue Bucket,' you buy with it, at the Post Office, a deferred Government annuity." I pulled out of my pocket a little bit of paper on which I had noted down a few numbers from Anne's "Table of MONEY RETURNABLE," which shall be copied out here.

"A man* beginning to put in eight shillings a-month regularly at the age of

20,	will receive at the age of 60,	£2	14	10	a-month to the end of his life.
25,	"	"	"	2	3	8	
30,	"	"	"	1	14	2	
35,	"	"	"	1	6	0	

I need not note down all the conversation which passed between Joe and me in the hay-field, even if I could remember it pretty correctly. The lad had strong sense and a clear head when he was perfectly sober, and the habit of drinking, that cord of sin, had not yet bound him so fast that he could not break free by a strong, manly effort. Joe took home my little piece of paper, and talked the matter over with his mother, and I know that he has now, for

* A woman receives a little less than a man, it being calculated that her life is likely to last longer than his.

the last half-year, been steadily carrying his eight shillings to the Post Office on the first Saturday in every month. It is needless to add that Joe has, every night, gone to his bed sober, and has doubtless enjoyed his rest all the more from the thought that he is never likely to eat the bitter bread of dependence.

"I'm comin' in for my fortin at sixty," Joe said to me merrily, the last time that we met; "the Post Office is my 'Bucket' now, to gather in for my use, when I wants it, the rain-water which was all a runnin' to waste."

And yet, though I have so often counselled others to buy a deferred annuity, I must own that I have not practised as I have preached. When I became a city missionary, with my son settled on his little farm, and my daughter comfortably married, I resolved that I would regularly lay by something to be a provision for old age. But it is one thing to resolve, and another thing to perform, and I found that, make what plans I might, I really could not lay by. I was in the midst of one of the poorest districts in London, and could no more lay up savings in the Post Office, than I could carry water in my hand, it was sure to slip through my fingers by the way. I tried to do it again and again, but I always found the attempt turn out a failure. One honest fellow whom I knew would, perhaps, be out of work for months, and have to pledge his tools to put bread into the mouths of his children, or a family was down with the fever, and not a blanket amongst them. I had to give up trying to save for myself, to have done so, under the circumstances in which I was placed, would have seemed to me almost a sin. I felt that I must just try to do my Master's work while it was day, and leave the care of life's evening

to Him. The missionary ventured to lay hold on the promise—*Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in trouble.*

The time of trouble arrived. Age came rather suddenly upon me, bringing weakness and sickness with it. I broke down completely in the midst of my work; the will to labour remained, but the strength for labour was gone. What would become of me now? This thought would sometimes press on me like a burden, but I tried to cast my cares upon Him who careth for us.

On one dull autumn day, a day which I shall never forget, when my pains were sharper than usual, and my spirits were low, and the yellow London-fog shut out all the daylight, filling the air with darkness and damp, the post brought me two letters at once. The one was in Charley's handwriting, so I opened it first. It was short, for it is more trouble to him to write six lines than to some men it would be to write six chapters; but it held as much love and kindness as could have been put into the largest sheet of foolscap. Charley offered a home to his worn-out old father, and his wife had signed her name after his.

"God will provide,—God has provided,—blessed be His Name!" I cried, and, in my joy and thankfulness for the blessing of having such a loving, dutiful son, it was some time before I remembered that I had a second letter to open. When I had broken its black seal, how great was my surprise as I read its contents! The letter was from the executor of Sir William Bond, a gentleman whom I had only known from my having helped to dispense liberal alms from him and his lady in our very poor district. I had no claim whatever upon Sir William, save that we had sought to serve the same Master, he with his

many talents, and I with my few; and yet he had, as I was now informed, settled thirty pounds a-year on the broken-down missionary for the rest of his life!

Tears flowed from my eyes as I read the executor's letter; I could not keep them in! Had the money been brought to me from Heaven by an angel, I could not have felt more deeply that it was a gift from Him who dealeth so tenderly, so bounteously with those who put their trust in Him.

Perhaps it is the comfort that I find in my own annuity that makes me the more anxious to persuade others to secure, as far as may be, independence for themselves. I am sure that had I brought not a shilling to Beechwood Farm, my Charley would never,—if he could have helped it,—have let me feel that I was a burden upon him. But I am heartily glad, I am deeply thankful to be able to contribute my share to meet family expenses. To do so places me on a pleasant footing with Anne, who is of a prudent and saving disposition, and it prevents many a little rub and jar. I could not have borne to remain at Beechwood Farm had I not been welcome to my daughter-in law as well as to her husband; I would not have consented to stop, had I felt that I was depriving my darling Kate of one comfort. There is another privilege, almost as precious as that of independence, which I enjoy through my pension: I have still the luxury of having something to give to others.

But if the sense of independence as regards man be a blessing, oh! how far greater is the blessing of a sense of *dependence* upon God!—the dependence of a weak child, who earns nothing, merits nothing, and yet receives all things from the tender love of a Parent! I love to realise, as I sit down to my

daily meals, that the table has been spread for me by my Heavenly Father. I rejoice all the more in the dutiful care of my son, and every comfort provided for me by the attention of his good wife, from seeing that it is God's love that is flowing towards me through earthly channels, warming towards the old man the young heart of his grand-daughter, and making his children's affection the staff of his feeble age! *Bless the Lord, oh! my soul, and forget not all His benefits!* From the cradle to hoary hairs has He watched over, guided, and fed me, leading me safely through every trial. When my feet have stumbled, the Lord has raised me; when they have wandered, He has brought me back to the narrow path of salvation! No one has more cause than old Arthur Astwood to thank the tender, forgiving Master, who loosened for him the growing CORDS OF SIN, and drew him gently towards Himself with CORDS OF A MAN, WITH BANDS OF LOVE.

CHAPTER XIII.

Talk by the Fireside.

THE conversation which we had had on the day which Carry spent at the farm, on the subject of giving to the Lord, and the reflections to which that conversation had given rise, made me search my memory for some anecdote bearing on the question of charity, from which to frame my little tale for the following Sunday.

"Ah!" cried my Birdie, as she peeped over my shoulder when I opened my book for the evening reading, "I see that you have called this story MISSION CORDS! I am so glad it is to be about missions. Now, we'll have some famous adventure with a lion,—or perhaps a hyena!" I could not see the dear bright little face behind me, but I could hear pleasure in the tone of the voice.

"What nonsense the child speaks," observed Anne. "One would think that she fancies that missionaries go abroad, gun in hand, only to fight with wild beasts."

"Oh! mother, it's not that," said my little pet, as she took her accustomed seat at my feet; "but when missionaries go to Africa and other wild places, they can't help having adventures, you know; they don't go to look out for wild beasts, but wild beasts come to look out for them. And I do like a story with a lot of danger in it!" continued the child, with animation.

"Yes, that's the mischief," observed Anne, strok-

ing down a crease in her black poplinet gown; "everything now is excitement. People who used to remain quietly in their own homes must rush about now from John o' Groat's House to Land's End, and much farther too, in search of exciting amusement. If they can't get it in that way, they needs must have it in books. Heroes and heroines must be tossed over precipices, blown up in ships, or eaten by tigers to please excitement-loving readers. This shows an unwholesome taste," continued Anne, looking annoyed at the crease which would not smoothe down for all her stroking; "it is a milder form of that love of horrors which makes Spaniards hurry to a bull-fight, or mobs crowd to see a murderer hanged."

Poor little Katie opened her blue eyes very wide, and looked half-alarmed at what she called "dashing stories" being classed with bull-fights and executions.

"I like people to get into dangers—if they get out of them again—like poor Tom Ewell," said the child. "I could not bear to have any one killed downright in a story; but is it wrong to be fond of hearing about lions?"

"I own that I enjoy reading a good lion-adventure myself," said honest Charley. "Mr Moffat the missionary's "Sketches in South Africa" was about the most amusing book that I ever set eyes on."

"'Twould have been just as good a book without the wild beasts in it," observed Anne, who had given up the crease in despair.

Charley shook his head, and Katie merrily laughed. It was clear that neither the father nor the daughter agreed in opinion with Anne.

"There is a good deal of truth in what Anne says about love of excitement," said I. "It is in reading

what it would be in eating were we to want every dish to be highly sugared or spiced, so as to lose our taste for anything simple. In this, as in everything else, wisdom appears to lie in moderation. You take no sugar with your own tea, Anne, but you do not object to your Katie having one little lump in hers."

"Or two big ones," suggested Birdie, with a knowing glance at her mother, who smiled in return.

"But my present story," I resumed, "is not about missionary adventure. There is not the shadow of a danger in it, except the danger of self-deception. My subject is the help which should be given by those at home to those who toil and suffer abroad, and the spirit in which the offering should be made."

Anne, who would as soon have forgotten to wind up the clock on the Saturday night as to omit sending her Christmas subscription to the Church Missionary Society, folded her hands, and prepared to listen, with a more complacent air than usual, as I began my third little story.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mission Cords.

"I DO entreat you, dear cousin, to give me something, if it be ever so little, for my collection for the African Mission Schools. Either money or any pretty trifles for the Fancy Bazaar would be so welcome. I know that you love the mission cause, and I myself am working from morning till night to help it."

Some such words as these formed the substance of a note which Arthur Astwood received one spring day from his young cousin and godchild, Gerty Manson, who lived with her father, a baker at Highgate. It was the first note that Arthur had ever received from Gerty. He had not met much with his cousins at Highgate; for as Arthur was a city missionary, the life which he led was a busy one, and he could seldom spare time or strength for a five miles' walk, part of it up a steep hill.

"So Gerty has taken to working from morning till night, and in the cause of missions," said Arthur to himself as he laid down the note. "I am heartily glad that the little girl cares for the wants of the heathen; I should hardly have thought that Gerty was one to do so; but I see that I have done her injustice. She shall have a shilling from me to add to her little collection, though I cannot manage to give it till my monthly allowance comes in."

In Gerty's note was enclosed a little circular about a Fancy Fair to be held in aid of the African Mis-

sion Schools. As Arthur had certainly no skill in making fancy articles, he handed over the paper to a friend. The missionary proposed answering Gerty's note in person, and taking his shilling to her on the first occasion when he could treat himself to a half-holiday, and a little country air at Highgate. Nearly a month, however, had elapsed before Arthur Astwood was able to set forth, staff in hand, for a pleasant walking excursion to the hill at the north of London.

How the city missionary enjoyed that pleasant walk! The day was lovely, his spirits were light, everything to him had sunshine upon it. Arthur could have wished indeed that London did not stretch out its arms so far, that houses and streets should not push back meadows and trees to such a distance. There are not many wild flowers to be gathered between Oxford Street and Highgate; and if any larks sing, which is doubtful, their notes are drowned by the noise of hoofs and rattle of wheels. Still Arthur thought that at each mile which he walked the air grew sweeter and lighter; he could feel that he was going upwards as well as onwards; and he fancied that the foliage and flowers in each little garden that he passed in the suburbs, were a great deal brighter and fresher than those in London squares He might not actually be in the country, but at least he was drawing near it; and the delight afforded by the beauties of nature is experienced perhaps by none more strongly than by the man who lives from January to December in one of the smoky streets of the city.

"Yes, here is country at last," cried Arthur, as he paused by a large enclosure of meadow-land, bordered with trees, from which was commanded a wide prospect of fair landscape on the one hand, thousands

of distant chimneys, with spires and church-towers rising up between them, on the other, with a smoky haze over all. The enclosure, however green the grass in it might be, showed signs of bustling human life, which took in no small degree from its rural appearance. The palings which bounded it were gay, not with overhanging wild-flowers, but with huge placards, in red and blue letters, which proclaimed to the numerous passers-by that the grand Fancy Fair for Mission Schools was to take place on that spot on the following day.

"I had almost forgotten the Fancy Fair," said Arthur to himself. "Well, I am glad that my visit to Highgate was not put off till to-morrow, or I should not have seen much of Gerty, as she is certain to be at the fête. Nor should I have cared for all the noise and bustle which a Fancy Fair would cause; strings of carriages, and flocks of gaily-dressed folk, would have made it appear as if, when I wanted to walk out of London, London was rolling out after me."

Not being in any haste to come to the end of his little journey, Arthur went up to the little paling, and looked into the pretty verdant enclosure. Men were there busily employed in driving stakes into the soft velvety sod, and in setting up one of the tents to be used for the fête of the morrow. The sun shone brightly on the white canvas, making it look almost like snow. One of the men engaged in raising the tent was cheerfully humming a tune as he fixed down a rope by its peg; it seemed as if the man enjoyed his work as much as the gay company might on the next day enjoy their pleasure. Arthur thought of St Paul busy at his tent-making at Corinth, and fancied how he, who in everything gave thanks, may have sung many a joyful hymn over his work.

"And how often," reflected the city missionary, as he stood leaning over the paling, "how often must the apostle at his tent-making have recalled the beautiful words of Isaiah:—*Enlarge the place of thy tent. Spare not; lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.* These words might indeed first be spoken to Zion, St Paul's own Zion, whose seed is to inherit the Gentiles; but the apostle, and we also, might apply them more widely as a call to the whole Christian Church, to extend, by missionary work over all the earth, the kingdom of her great Master. To her comes the blended command and promise—*Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left.*"

Thought continued to flow on in the same direction as Arthur watched the men at work before him. It seemed to him as if the Scripture emblem of a tent, widened that it might cover more space, showed a distinction between two kinds of labour, both of which are connected with efforts to spread the Gospel. The missionary toiling abroad, teaching, preaching, seeking to break up the hardened soil of ignorance and superstition, he is engaged in strengthening and driving in the *stakes.* Those who have the far easier work of helping the cause with their purses, they are lengthening the *cords.* Money has been called the sinews of war; money forms, as it were, the cords of the mission; not indeed the most important part of the tent, but still a part essential.

"An honourable and a blessed work it is to lengthen those mission cords," said Arthur Astwood to himself. "Here is a kind of labour in which the young and the feeble may join. This is the object to further which yon tent is now being raised, in which the gay and the fair will assemble to-morrow.

I wish that I could think that the world and its follies would be shut out from that tent; I fear that it cannot be so; but I can, and will, and do hope that many of the workers, and the sellers, and the buyers of the pretty trifles sold therein, will help to lengthen the cords, because they love the cause of missions. Blessings on all who do so, from the princess whose name appears in large letters on each placard, to the poor bill-poster who set it up, if he did so with a hearty wish for success to the African schools!"

Arthur now resumed his walk, and though going slowly, for the road was steep, and he had the burden of years to carry, in ten minutes reached the villa-like house in which his god-daughter dwelt. With its fancy blinds, and neat painted door with brass knocker, the villa looked rather like a neighbour to than a part of the shop in which the Mansons carried on their business. As Arthur had never yet found his cousin or her daughter in the shop, he did not now look for them there, but walked up to the painted door, and gave a modest rap with the bright brass knocker.

What an air of comfort pervaded the neat little parlour into which he was soon admitted! The new carpet and pretty green paper on the walls, the library books on the table, the jars on the mantel-piece filled with gay flowers, the golden fish gliding about merrily in the glass vase set in the window, all told of ease and enjoyment of the little luxuries of civilised life. Arthur had time to look around him, as neither Mrs Manson nor Gerty chanced to be in the room. He contrasted the cheerful bright English home of the well-to-do baker, with the pleasant air of spring breathing in at the open window, with the comfortless dwelling of a missionary

in some parts of Africa, where the fever-bringing blast appears to come from the mouth of a furnace!

"A very different lot is that of many of the Lord's messengers to the heathen, from that which has fallen to so many thousands of Christians in England in pleasant homes like this!" Thus reflected Arthur Astwood. "Here there is no burning heat to dry up the sap of life; the centipede and the scorpion lurk in no corner of this abode; here there is no danger from sand-storms, hurricanes, or earthquakes; the howl of the wolf or the jackal is never heard at night. How comparatively easy is the work of lengthening the cords to that of driving in the stakes! How different the amount of self-denial required to spare a little from a full cup of comfort, to that of tasting the bitterness of exile amongst heathens who know not the Lord!"

Arthur's glance fell upon a small globe in one of the corners of the room. He walked up to it, and as he looked on the ball representing the earth, with its lines of longitude and latitude crossing each other all over it, something like a prayer rose from his heart.

"Oh! may the day soon come when around this whole earth, from north to south, from east to west, like this net-work of geographical lines, the MISSION CORDS may extend! May the earnest prayerful efforts of workers abroad, and helpers at home, hasten the blessed time when *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea!*" (Isaiah xi. 9.)

CHAPTER XV.

Subject continued.

ARTHUR'S reflections were interrupted by the entrance of his cousin, Mrs Manson, a short little woman, all sunshine and smiles, who looked as if she fed on the fat of the land, and had never had a sorrow or a care to wrinkle her plump cheek, or disturb her easy composure. She was followed by Gerty, a smaller copy of herself, save that the young girl did not look quite so stout, nor, if the truth must be told, quite so good-humoured as her mother.

Arthur received a kindly welcome from his cousin; gooseberry wine, cake, and other good things were pressed upon him, Mrs Manson opening a cupboard that appeared to be overflowing with dainties, and with evident pleasure doing the honours of her bright little home, and hearing praises of its comfort and beauty.

Some minutes passed before Arthur found an opportunity of speaking on the subject of the collection for the African schools. He then drew forth his shilling, saying to Gerty, as he did so, "I am afraid that you must have thought that I had forgotten your request, as I have not answered you note; but you will forgive a busy old man, who cannot now overtake all the work which he knows that he ought to do."

Gerty Manson did not attempt to take up the shilling which Arthur had laid on the table before her. "I dare say," she coldly observed, "that you

have some other way in which you would like to spend your money."

Arthur could not help contrasting Gerty's present indifference with the great eagerness and warmth which had been expressed in her note. He thought that the girl must be disappointed at the smallness of his contribution.

"I have given, not what I would, but what I could," Arthur observed, gently pushing the shilling towards his godchild. "The mission schools have my hearty good-will, but I cannot work for them, Gerty, as you do."

"She has indeed worked for them like a slave—an African slave—I will say that for her!" exclaimed Mrs Manson, who, having cared for the comfort of her guest, was now leaning back in her easy-chair, plying a crochet-needle. "Morning and night Gerty was at it; she grudged the time for meals, lesson-books were all thrown aside, and as for taking a walk—I could hardly get her to leave the house for ten minutes. It was clipping and snipping, stiching and sewing, from sunrise to sunset! Gerty, she's a wonderful girl at her needle when she works for an object she cares for."

Gerty's present work seemed to be that of twisting a straw round and round.

"Can I see the pretty things which she has made for the fancy-fair?" asked Arthur.

"They were not to be put on a stall at the fair, they were to be sold before it came off," said the mother, who took by far the largest share in the conversation. "I'll tell you all about it, Cousin Arthur, she continued, while Gerty sauntered off to the window, and appeared to be watching the gold fish in the glass, with her back turned towards her mother and Arthur. "It was given out that who-

ever should collect the sum of five pounds for the African mission schools should be allowed, on the day of the fancy-fair, to come forward and present a purse holding the money to the princess herself! Now, my dear girl set her heart on having this honour; it was very natural to wish it, you know; one can't get a bow and a smile from a princess every day in one's life; and so Gerty thought that by collecting money from her friends, or selling them pieces of her work, she might manage to scrape up five pounds for such an excellent object."

"Which excellent object?" thought Arthur. "That of helping to lengthen mission cords, or that of winning a smile and a bow from a royal lady?"

"I wish that I'd never set in a stitch!" muttered Gerty, without turning round.

"It was to be such a beautiful sight, you know," continued Mrs Manson, who did not appear to have noticed the low exclamation; "all the givers of purses were to be in white muslin, with ribbons of pink—Gerty always looks well in pink, and she had the muslin dress by her. Her father gave her a half-crown, and I gave her another, just to begin her collection, and the materials for her work came to a pretty penny—more than we had reckoned on spending. But you don't suppose that we grudged our money for such an excellent object?"

Arthur did not answer the question; it would have perplexed him to have done so; but Mrs Manson happily did not require any reply. She went running on with her story.

"Some of our relations and particular friends, like yourself, Gerty could ask direct for a little money; but, would you believe it? not counting the two half-crowns which we gave, Gerty collected in this way only four and sixpence, though the poor

child had written—I don't know how many letters!"

Gerty's face was still turned from Arthur Astwood, but the little impatient jerk of her waist and shrug of her shoulders showed her feelings so plainly, that he could not but picture to himself the scowl which he did not see.

"Then she went round with her basket full of—oh! the prettiest things that you can imagine," Mrs Manson went on, dropping her crochet-work on her knee, for she required her plump fingers for counting. "There were four anti-macassars (two of them I crocheted myself), six cosies, three card-baskets, and five pincushions—dear! dear! I can't say all that there was, but I know that we ticketed all, and counted up the prices upon them, and they came quite up to the five pounds, let alone our money collection. So, as I said, my dear girl went round with her basket (we got our lad to carry it, of course), to every one of our friends that was at all likely to buy. But, oh! how little charity there is in this world! Most of the people said that they were going themselves to the fancy-fair, and would rather reserve their money to spend at the ladies' stalls."

Gerty was stirring the water in the glass with the straw which she held in her hand, doubtless to the great discomfort of the fish.

"No one seemed to use cosies," continued Mrs Manson; "every one had more anti-macassars than they knew what to do with; and as for the card-baskets, they had not a chance of being sold. People turned over everything in the basket to find some article that would not cost more than a six-penny piece. The last person to whom poor dear Gerty took her store was the wife of our clergyman

—and only guess what she said when she looked at the basket?"

Arthur was not disposed to guess; but had he been ever so much inclined to do so, he would not have had time to put in a word.

"She actually said that she would be happy to *take charge of the articles*," cried Mrs Manson, "and make them over to one of the ladies holding a stall! Did you ever hear the like? As if *that* would have helped to put the five pounds into the purse of my daughter!" Mrs Manson leant back in her easy-chair, and laughed heartily, as if the offer of the clergyman's wife had been the most ridiculous thing in the world.

"Perhaps the lady thought, and justly thought," began Arthur, but he was not able to finish his sentence.

"Of course, my girl was not going to do anything so absurd," said the mother, as soon as her fit of mirth was over; "so she brought back her basket, anti-macassars, card-racks, and cosies, and *seven* shillings in her purse, only seven shillings! Why, the materials had cost much more than that! Did you ever hear of such a thing in your life?"

There was no reply to the question, unless a sort of low growl which burst from Gerty could be called by that name. What caused amusement to the merry-hearted mother had clearly a very contrary effect upon the girl.

"Of course the purse of five pounds is quite out of the question," continued Mrs Manson, still in a tone of most perfect good humour. "I'm sorry that the world has grown so uncharitable and stingy, but it is not our fault, you know. *We*, at least, have done our duty, and more than our duty, I am sure, for we have no particular concern with African mis-

sion schools; they don't come in our line of business. But fancy what Mrs Capper said this morning (she's a neighbour and customer, you must know); she said that all the fine ladies in white and pink who are going up with their purses would not have liked to have had a baker's daughter as one of their number."

This was too much for the patience of Gerty. She almost knocked over the glass and demolished the fish, as she suddenly turned round with tiger-like fierceness expressed in her face.

"My money is just as good as any duchess's money!" she exclaimed, her brown eyes flashing with pride; "and I'd just as good a right as the best of them to offer my purse to the princess!"

"Yes, my dearie, we know it, we know it," said the peace-loving, ease-loving parent; "and when you go to the fancy-fair to-morrow——"

"I'm not going!" cried the disappointed, mortified girl; "if I can't take a purse, I don't care for the show—I wouldn't cross the road to see it! I hope—I hope with all my heart that it may rain cats and dogs to-morrow, and spoil all the fun and fine dresses!"

Mrs Manson lifted up her plump fingers as a kind of gentle remonstrance against this not very amiable wish; but said, in a soothing voice, "It has been very provoking, dearie, but you've the comfort of knowing that we've done everything that was right, that you've worked hard for an excellent object. You will always have satisfaction in your own mind when you remember this time, for good works, like yours, never can go for nothing. Cousin Arthur will tell you, for no one knows better than he, that we needn't mind ingratitude and unkindness from the selfish world if we deserve the favour of heaven."

Mrs Manson looked triumphantly at the city missionary as she uttered the last sentence, as though she felt that she had expressed a most pious sentiment, and was quite sure that he must agree to, and approve of, what she had said. But her words had grated upon the soul of Arthur Astwood; the idea of *deserving* the favour of heaven by even the most earnest, self-denying efforts, was repugnant to one who remembered that the most devoted workers are to call themselves *unprofitable servants.* But this was not all; in the present case Arthur could not but think that, instead of *meriting* anything for what she had done simply to gratify self, Gerty was actually needing *forgiveness* for pride, malice, and utter indifference in regard to the "excellent object" for which she had once so earnestly pleaded. Gerty had deceived others as to her motives, and so had incurred the guilt of hypocrisy, and probably, even at that moment, of petulant anger, the foolish girl was deceiving herself. The missionary was impelled to speak in order to prevent such self-delusion; but it seemed to be impossible to do so for two minutes together in the presence of Mrs Manson, who liked conversation to be all on one side. This difficulty was, however, soon ended by a voice from the adjoining shop calling out "Dinah! Dinah!"

"Ah! there's my gentleman wanting me," cried the baker's wife, putting down her crochet work, and rising from her chair. "Never mind, I'll be back in a minute," and she hurried out of the parlour, leaving Arthur and his godchild alone together.

CHAPTER XVI.

Subject continued.

As soon as her mother had left the room, Gerty came from the window and took possession of the easy-chair upon which Mrs Manson had been sitting. The girl's face still bore traces of ill temper and disappointment; she did not appear to be inclined to begin the conversation with her cousin.

"Gerty," said Arthur Astwood, "do you yourself feel that, notwithstanding your natural disappointment at gaining so little where you had hoped by your industry to earn so much, do you yourself feel that you have done everything that was right? Have you, indeed, the satisfaction of knowing that you have, at least, performed a great duty?"

"Of course I have," replied Gerty.

"You think that what cost you such labour and trouble was really an offering made to your Heavenly King?"

"Of course it was," said Gerty, a little impatiently. "You don't suppose that the ugly, black, thick-lipped, woolly-headed little niggers are more to me than those gold-fish—or half so much. If I help to put them into mission schools, it is not for their own sakes, I'm sure," (the words were spoken with a scornful sneer), "it is because we are told in church, and in all the missionary papers, that it is right and good to look after the heathen. Why, even the princess must think that, and all the grand ladies that hold the stalls, or we should never have them coming to the Fancy Bazaar to-morrow."

"The question is not whether the cause of missions be a good one, or whether it be our duty to aid it," observed Arthur Astwood, mildly; "*that* can hardly be doubted by those who believe that the Saviour Himself gave the command—*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.* My question is, Do you think that the time, work, and money which you have given were really an acceptable offering made to your Heavenly King?"

"There's not a doubt about it," cried Gerty. "You don't think that I was so shabby as to keep back the money that I had collected for these stupid African schools. No, I made it all over to the clergyman's wife, sixteen and sixpence—*sixteen and sixpence,*" she repeated proudly, as if to overwhelm, with a sense of her generosity, the stingy cousin who had contributed but *one* shilling. "I've no doubt," added Gerty, bitterly, while tears rose up in her eyes, "that one of her own girls will go in white muslin and pink ribbons to the Fancy Fair, carrying the money which I gave. But it was not necessary for me to give the purse which I had bought to hold the five pounds, the purse which I meant to lay before the princess—such a beauty of a purse! No, indeed, I kept that."

"Now, Gerty," said Arthur Astwood, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper, and drawing his chair a little closer to that on which his god-daughter sat, "would it not be possible for you to put five bright little copper pieces into that pretty purse, and go to-morrow and present them for the mission schools to the princess?"

Gerty was too much amazed at such a proposal, coming from a missionary too, even to utter an exclamation. She stared at Arthur Astwood with her eyes and mouth wide open, as if she thought that he had suddenly lost his wits.

"The purse would *look* all the same," observed Arthur. "You might also appear in white muslin and pretty pink ribbons."

"I should be found out," exclaimed Gerty; "I should be hooted out of the place."

"But supposing that you could be quite certain that no one would find you out, would there be any harm then in your taking the farthings instead of the gold?"

"I do not know what you can take me for, Mr Astwood," cried Gerty, with an angry jerk of the head, as she pushed her easy-chair back to the wall. "Do you suppose that I would mock and insult the daughter of my queen by presenting her with such worthless trash? I would not do such a thing for the world."

"Ah, dear child, you are indignant, and justly indignant, at the bare idea of such mockery," said the city missionary; "but is there no danger of our acting such a part towards our Heavenly King, appearing to bring to Him gold, while what we offer, as if for His service, is in His sight utterly worthless."

"I don't understand you one bit," muttered Gerty.

"Can we imagine for one instant that He to whom belongs all the treasures of earth and heaven can require our poor silver and gold to work His will? He has but to speak the word, and the stones and the dust can be turned into mines of wealth. The great Creator can lengthen the mission-cords without any help from His feeble creatures," said Arthur.

"Then why is it that we are being perpetually asked to give money for one thing or another?" cried Gerty.

"It always seems to me to be one of the most beautiful proofs of the Creator's tender love," observed Arthur, "that, knowing that *it is more blessed*

to give than to receive, He permits us to come before Him with humble offerings, and deigns to accept them at our hands. It is thought an act of grace when a princess, though but like ourselves a creature of dust, stands to receive, almost as if it were given to herself, contributions to some charitable object. She needs them not; they will not add one stone to her palace, or to her coronet one gem; yet she accepts with a smile. If it be considered an honour and a pleasure to be permitted to lay an offering before a weak mortal woman, what must it be to be allowed to present our little tribute before the great King of kings?"

"I never heard such a strange view of charity as yours," exclaimed Gerty. "You seem to think that we should consider ourselves to be honoured, and that we should really feel quite thankful to be *allowed* to spend our own money on missions."

"I not only *seem* to think this, but I do actually think it from my heart," said Arthur Astwood.

"Then it's rather hard upon all the poor folk who can give nothing," cried Gerty, looking as if she fancied that she had caught her cousin in a trap. "After your way of thinking, the rich get all the honour and blessing, because it's only the rich who give much."

"That I deny," cried Arthur, eagerly. "It is not the rich who give most. Have you forgotten what was said by One who saw the rich casting large gifts into the temple treasury, and then a widow dropping in her two mites? *This poor widow has cast in more than they all.* No, Gerty, no; the largest offerings are not from the wealthy; they have no advantage whatever over the lowly. The gift of love is the *golden* gift, be it but a cup of cold water. And by the Heavenly King this *golden* gift is alone ac-

cepted; all beside is but a mockery in His pure eyes, whatever it may appear in those of the world; as your purse would look as well to bystanders if it held brass as if it held gold, yet would certainly *not* be accepted; its presentation being regarded as an insult to the royal lady to whom it might be brought."

"I don't know what you mean by 'the gift of love,'" said Gerty.

"Do not be angry with me, my child, if I ask you to bear patiently, and answer faithfully, a few questions regarding your contribution to the African Mission Schools. Did you labour so hard in order to please your Lord, or to please yourself?"

Arthur paused, but received, and perhaps expected, no reply.

"Did you desire His approval? Would that have satisfied your heart, even had no one in the world known anything of your work?"

Gerty fidgeted in her chair.

"Was the honour of presenting a purse to the princess, or the joy of presenting an offering to your King, the thought uppermost in your mind when you worked from morning till night?"

"I don't know why you should put such questions to me!" cried Gerty, starting up from her seat.

"Forgive, my child, an old man who has seen enough of the treachery of his own heart to wish to set his god-daughter on her guard against self-deception," said Arthur, gently laying his hand on the arm of his young relation. "I would not have you go on, as I fear that too many go on, fancying that they are doing all that is right and winning favour from the Most High, when their object is to gain human praise, when they give to be seen of men, when their alms are less than worthless in the sight of Him who readeth the heart."

CHAPTER XVII.

Subject continued.

ARTHUR'S words, however mildly spoken, had a very different effect from what he had wished or intended. Mrs Manson returned to the parlour as he concluded his sentence, and Gerty at once broke out into a passionate exclamation. "Oh! mamma, it's a pity you were not here just now! Cousin Arthur has been giving me such a lecture! he thinks me so worldly—so wicked—because I've been working my fingers to the bone for the blacks! He says that I've acted just as badly as if I were to take to the princess a purse of false money!" and darting on the city missionary a look of anger and spite, the girl flounced out of the parlour, banging the door behind her, to the surprise of Arthur and her mother.

"Let me explain," began the guest in a tone of apology; but an explanation was both unnecessary and impossible with Mrs Manson. After her first surprise at her daughter's outburst of temper, her mind, like oil not easily disturbed, returned to its usual state of placid repose.

"You must not mind her, Cousin Arthur, you must not mind her," said the baker's good-humoured wife; "you see Gerty, poor child, has been a little put out;" and seating herself again in her soft easy chair, and taking up her crochet, Mrs Manson began over again the whole account of the efforts to collect five pounds, the beauty of the articles made, the

stinginess of her friends, the strange offer of the clergyman's wife,—in short, the story from beginning to end, with some additional particulars more amusing to herself than to her hearer. The tale lasted until Arthur rose to take leave. He left a kind message for Gerty, who did not come to bid him good-bye, though her mother called loudly at the bottom of the stairs to tell her that Cousin Arthur was going away.

"How true is the saying, that two of the most difficult things in the world to do well are to give a rebuke and to take a rebuke," thought Arthur, as he quitted that bright, pretty dwelling. "Could I have expressed myself with more delicacy and kindness? I fear that, unless I had spoken tolerably plainly, I should not have been understood. Gerty can scarcely be made to see that she would have worked and toiled all the same had gilding the monument of London been the object to be helped by the Fancy Fair, instead of that of lengthening mission-cords. Gerty wanted praise, she wanted amusement, and was willing to buy both at the cost of a certain amount of labour and money. And this is what is called fulfilling a duty, and meriting the favour of heaven! Alas! I fear that if, from the money seemingly offered to the Lord, all were taken that is given from motives of selfishness, worldliness, and pride, there would be a grievous lessening of the amount of the treasure; the worthless brass would be found to have in quantity far exceeded the gold."

A well-known Eastern story recurred to the mind of Arthur, as slowly, for he now was weary, he descended Highgate Hill on his way back to London. He resolved to write it out for his godchild that evening, and to send it to her with a kind little

note. The story, as well as he could recollect it, was as follows.

Eastern Tale.

There was a mighty king, the ruler of an Eastern land, who was full of wealth and full of pride. He resolved on building a splendid church, grand as the Temple of Solomon—a church so rich in ornament, so vast in size, that the like of it should not be seen on all the face of the earth.

"All men shall see my glory when they look on my church!" cried the king; "it shall hand down my name to future ages as that of the greatest and most pious of men. I will let no one share with me the honour of raising the glorious building; I forbid, on pain of death, that any one contribute to my great work. I will pay the whole cost out of my treasures, and all the merit shall be mine."

So the workmen toiled and laboured, and the sound of hammer, and chisel, and axe were heard all through the day, and sometimes all through the night also; for the king was very impatient to see his great church completed. He thought that he was about a great and holy work, and that through it he should merit much praise from man, and much favour from the Most High. In order that future generations might always remember who had raised this most splendid church, the king caused his own name to be deeply cut in a stone which was placed in a high position in the building, where none could touch it, but all must see it, so that it should ever remain as a memorial of his glory.

The church was finished, and every tongue praised its grandeur and beauty. With joy and pride swelling in his heart, the king, surrounded by his courtiers, went to look on the mighty work completed.

He raised his eyes with a glance of triumph towards the stone on which his name had been carved. What were his amazement and wrath when he saw on that stone, not his own name, but that of a woman?

"What is this that I behold?" exclaimed the furious monarch. "Who has dared to alter the inscription which I caused to be placed on high?"

The wondering courtiers glanced at each other, and were silent. The trembling master-builder, falling on his knees, assured the king that his name, and his name alone, had been seen on the previous evening deeply cut in the stone. Many eyes had beheld it there; many lips could bear witness that the king's commands had been most strictly obeyed.

The cheek of the monarch grew pale. Turning hastily to his courtiers, he demanded whether any of them knew anything of the woman whose name appeared carved where his own should have been.

None of the courtiers had ever heard that such a person existed. The name was utterly unknown to all the wealthy and great. One of the workmen, however, ventured to come forward and say that he knew of a poor widow bearing that name, who lived very near to the gate of the church.

"Bring her hither at once!" cried the king.

Terrified at being summoned before the great monarch, and more amazed than any one else had been at seeing her humble name inscribed on high, the poor widow fell on her knees before the king, of whose slightest notice she deemed herself to be quite unworthy.

"Did I not command that no one, on pain of death, should contribute to the building of this church?" cried the king. "What hast thou done, O woman! that unseen hands should thus mysteri-

ously blot out my name, and carve thine instead, as if thou—and thou only—hadst raised this magnificent pile?"

"I have done nothing, mighty king," faltered the widow. "I was forbidden to add so much as one stone raised to the glory of Him whom my heart delights to honour."

"Thou must have done something," said the monarch: "fear not to confess the truth,—no harm to thee can follow. I cannot punish one whom it seems that the powers above regard with favour, and proclaim to be the builder of this great church, upon which I have lavished my treasures."

More astonished than ever, the widow remained for some moments in thought before she replied, "All that thy servant can call to mind, O king, is that she brought a wisp of straw to one of the horses engaged in drawing hither a heavy load of stones. For thy servant said in her heart, 'Though I am forbidden to help ever so little in building this holy church, I may give a wisp of straw to the horses that are bringing stones for the work.'"

And that wisp of straw, given by *love*, was counted of more price than the silver, and the marble, and the gold which had been freely lavished by the king. The proud monarch thought that he was deserving heavenly reward when he was seeking for earthly glory alone; while the wisp of straw of the widow was changed into a costly gift by the lowly, grateful love which had led her to do what she could.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Subject concluded.

REFLECTING a good deal on this Eastern tale, which, though it be but a fable, embodies a great and important truth, Arthur Astwood went on his way back to his London home. The walk had wearied the old missionary, and as he had to pass near the lodging of a friend of his, Mrs Ewell, who lived with her son, the crippled shoemaker, Arthur resolved to stop with them for an hour, to rest his tired limbs, and refresh his mind with Christian converse.

The Ewells lived in a narrow London alley, not a charming place of abode; and yet the city missionary never left their humble dwelling without feeling that a blessing from heaven rested upon it.

As Arthur turned down the dull close alley, he met a poor needlewoman whom he knew. She carried a baby on her bosom, and a covered basket on her arm. Her garments, patched and threadbare, clung around her wasted form; but a look of pleasure rested on her thin and careworn face.

"Good day, Hannah Saul," said the city missionary. "Have you been to our good friends the Ewells?"

"Good indeed you may call them," said the woman, "and friends too," she added heartily, "for a friend in need is a friend indeed." She glanced at the basket on her arm. "There's many a meal as they've spared for us; and they've little enough for themselves, I take it."

"Is your husband better?" enquired Arthur Astwood.

"He'll be the better for this," replied Mrs Saul, looking down again at her basket. "He's had little sleep these last eight nights, but Mrs Ewell, bless her! has taken turns with me to sit up beside him, and I think that the worst be's over. The Lord reward her for it,—and reward her good son also, for he teaches my children every Sunday night at the school."

"Here is 'the wisp of straw,' the 'golden gift,'" thought Arthur, as he parted from the poor woman. "A rich man may, without an effort, sign a cheque for a hundred pounds, and be regarded as a generous benefactor, and yet have offered absolutely nothing to the Lord. We may bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and yet, without charity, heavenly love, find at last, to our keen disappointment, that all our gifts profit us nothing. The Ewells have little with which to help those a little poorer than themselves; but they give their time, their sympathy, their thought, the good word uttered in season, the portion of food from a board which is but scantily furnished. It may be said of them, as of the Macedonians of old, that the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality; for to their power, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves."

Though the alley in which the Ewells resided was in itself somewhat dirty and dull, though the house in which they lodged was built but of the soot-stained bricks of London, there was something cheerful and home-like in the humble abode. The glass window of their small shop was clean, and bright were the gilt letters over the door. The window on the first floor made Arthur think of the country home in which

his friends had once resided. It had a little imitation of green paling, with a miniature white gate in front, serving to support a few pots of flowers, which were evidently carefully tended—bright scarlet geranium, and yellow-blossomed sweet-smelling musk. A little curtain of spotless white muslin served as a background, and a bird hung up in a cage was warbling as gaily as if green fields were around him.

Arthur Astwood, as usual, received a hearty welcome in the shoemaker's home. The smooth silver hair braided under Jane Ewell's cap told of past trials, rather perhaps than of age; but her face was placid and calm; it wore that expression of heavenly peace which is better than earthly joy.

"Oh! Mr Astwood, is that you?" exclaimed the shoemaker, rising as quickly as his crippled limbs would allow, and shaking the city missionary warmly by the hand, while his mother placed a chair for their guest. "We have been expecting you to call," he continued, "since you left us yon bit of paper about the fair for the mission schools. Mother, where have you put the slippers?"

Mrs Ewell went to a press, faced with glass, which contained the shoemaker's modest stock-in-trade. She took out of it a beautiful pair of worked slippers, suited for a gentleman's wear, and handed them to her son, who looked at his mother's handiwork and his own with something of pleasure and pride.

"You see this has been a kind of joint concern 'twixt mother and me," said Tom Ewell; "I am not much up to the fancy-work trade, but don't you think that we've made a pretty neat job between us?"

"The slippers are fit for a prince," said Astwood.

"We thought," observed Mrs Ewell, pleased, like her son, with the praise of the work, upon which they had spared no trouble, "we thought that this pair might be put on one of the ladies' stalls, quite quietly, you know, when no one was looking that way; and they might please some visitor's fancy, and bring in something to help the African schools."

"I wish that I had called here on my way to, instead of my return from, Highgate," said Arthur, "I would have taken your slippers with me. But the Fancy Fair takes place to-morrow, and I scarcely know how we now can send them. I had not a notion that you would work for the fair."

Both mother and son looked a little disappointed at finding that it was too late for them to send their contribution.

"You might be sure," said Tom, "that we'd count it a pleasure to do what we could, little enough as that might be. Perhaps, mother," he continued, addressing himself to Jane Ewell, "we'd better sell these slippers ourselves, and send our mite in cash. It don't much matter, after all, whether the money comes from a pretty decked-out stall, or from a poor shoemaker's shop. It's not the carriages, or the brass band, or the feathers and lace of the ladies, I take it, that will make it go farther in helping to give the Gospel to the poor little blacks."

"'Twill serve equally well to lengthen the mission cords in either case," observed Arthur.

"Yes, if the slippers can find a purchaser here," said Mrs Ewell, rather doubtfully, "but I fear——"

Her sentence was cut short by the entrance of a gentleman, who came at that moment into the shop.

"Are the boots repaired?" he enquired; but

before receiving an answer, the gentleman caught sight of Arthur Astwood, and the city missionary rose from his seat, recognising Sir William Bond, whom he had often met in the dwellings of the poor.

"Glad to see you, Astwood; pray sit down, you look tired," said Sir William, motioning to the missionary to resume his seat.

"The boots are ready, sir," said Tom Ewell; "they shall be taken home this evening."

"Handsome pair of slippers these," said Sir William, taking up the pair, which still lay on the counter; "made up of some lady's work, I suppose?"

"No, sir, they're for sale," said Tom Ewell.

"The price?"

"Ten shillings."

"I'll take them; you will send them home with the mended boots."

Mother and son exchanged glances of pleasure at the sale being so quickly effected. Arthur Astwood, who shared their gratification, could not resist saying to Sir William Bond, "These slippers, sir, are sold for the benefit of the African mission schools; they were intended to appear at the Fancy Fair to-morrow, but my friends here are beforehand with the ladies; it appears that the charity-sale is to open in the shoemaker's shop."

"And your friends here do not do what the ladies are apt to do, ask twice as much for an article as it is worth," said Sir William; "but I suppose that we must not find fault with the custom, as the money all goes to help a good cause. Not to break through the ladies' rule, we'd better, I think, make the half-sovereign a whole one," and drawing out a bright new piece from his purse, Sir William placed

it on the counter with a good-humoured smile, nodded a good-bye to Arthur, and quitted the place.

"Well, mother, I can only wish the ladies like success in their sale!" exclaimed Tom Ewell, who appeared to be far more delighted at having made so much money for the mission schools than he would have been had the sovereign been given to add to the comforts of his humble abode.

"This piece is *real gold*," said Arthur Astwood, as he thoughtfully surveyed the sovereign, which he had taken up from the counter.

"I hope that you've no cause to doubt that?" cried Mrs Ewell, a little anxiously, not understanding the cause of the meditative manner in which her friend examined the coin and uttered the observation; "Sir William never would pass false money!"

"No, it is *not* false money," replied Arthur Astwood, placing it in her hand; "it is good gold, pure gold, such as that which the wise men of old brought and offered to the Heavenly King." And he thought of the coming time when every such gift of lowly love will be acknowledged, and a thousand fold repaid to those who have laid up *treasure in heaven, where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.*

CHAPTER XIX.

Dull and Dreary.

EVERYTHING seems to have gone wrong at the farm since I read aloud my last story on Sunday evening, or perhaps it seems to me to be so because I am a peevish, restless old man, and have not yet learned in small things, as I trust that I have learned in greater, to rest on the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. There has been a thaw, followed by pelting rain, which tries me more than the cold, clear frost, and has brought on very sharp attacks of pain in my limbs, so that it is agony to me to rise from my chair. Three times on Monday did I open my red book of CORDS and attempt to write in it; three times I threw aside my pen; I was not in the mood even to think of a story.

"Who am I that I should try to teach others, when I rather need teaching myself? ay, and chiding too!" thought I. "Is a Christian, who has been told to rejoice always, is he to feel downhearted and miserable because of a little weakness and pain? Are his spirits to depend upon the direction of the wind, and veer about with the weather-cock?"

But self-chiding did me but little good, and small matters still worried and depressed me. My darling Katie suffered from face-ache, and was kept from going to school on the Monday. I would fain have had her beside me, made her rest her poor little head on my shoulder, and have cheered and

amused her as well as I could, to make her forget her pain. But Anne sent Katie up to lie down on her bed, and through half the day I could hear my poor Birdie sobbing and crying, for her room is just over the parlour, and all around was so still (save the plashing of the rain against the window), that every sob reached my ears. Katie would have been happier beside me, I am certain of that, and it made my heart ache to hear her crying.

I need not write "as it grew dark," for all through that wet day it had been dark; but at about four o'clock on the winter's evening I heard Anne's loud exclamation, "the pipe's burst, and the kitchen's in a flood!" Then, indeed, there was no more stillness in Beechwood Farm, but a shouting and trampling, and rushing to and fro, so that one might have fancied that the whole house was in danger of being swept away by a deluge. This, it may be said, was a trifle; and it was but a trifle that Anne was put out for the rest of the evening, answered in snappish monosyllables, lost her temper even with Charley, and would not let Katie come down stairs to bid her grandad good night. Anne may have been perfectly right in keeping the child away; the ground floor was damp after the rain and the flooding, as a rheumatic old man felt to his cost; but I *did* find my daughter-in-law's temper a trial, and was rather impatient myself, and was tempted to brood over small worries, instead of counting over great mercies. Mine must be still a sadly undisciplined heart, and age has not yet brought me wisdom.

On Tuesday morning my poor darling came down stairs relieved from pain, but with her pale little face tied up, and her eyes looking swollen from crying. Charley came in late to dinner with the news

that our favourite cow had sickened, and, as he feared, was scarcely likely to recover. Anne was still either silent or snappish, and still down poured the steady rain, making a brown pool in the middle of the yard, and causing little muddy streams to appear on each side of the road in front of the farm.

"We're not likely to have visitors to-day," observed Charley, as he cut a large hunch from the cheese; but the words were scarcely out of his mouth when Katie, who sat facing the window, exclaimed, "Why, here's Carry Keith coming all through the rain!"

"The girl must be out of her senses," cried Anne, "to come in her flaunting finery on such a day as this!"

If Carry still wore finery, it certainly looked anything but flaunting. I once compared her to a black swan, with her plumed hat and her fine silk dress, as she walked with an easy swimming motion, bearing her chest forward and her head erect, with a jaunty self-satisfied air. Now, if the poor girl were to be compared to any bird, it would be to a half-drowned jackdaw, for the fringed parasol which she carried had been altogether insufficient to protect her and her clothes from the violent rain. Carry's plume was draggled, her black silk dress clung wet and glistening around her, the high-heeled boots were clogged with mud, and the worked petticoat, anything but white, was splashed and spotted with mire.

Charley rose and opened the door, and Carry entered, to our surprise, in tears. The poor girl looked so forlorn, that Anne, to her credit, made no remark, though every step taken by her niece left a mud-mark on the floor, but merely took from her

the dripping parasol which Carry was about to throw down upon a new rug.

"Why, what's the matter, Carry?" cried Katie.

"What brings you here in such weather?" asked Anne.

"Never mind, wife, what brings her here," said Charley; "just take her up to your room, and let her have something warm and dry, for every stitch in her dress seems to be drenched with the rain."

Anne, who, though she said nothing, seemed to be rather put out by the unexpected visit, led Carry out of the kitchen in which we were dining, (I had managed to get thither, though with great difficulty, for Anne never allows eating in the parlour, having a horror for a crumb on the carpet). Katie took up the half-emptied dish of boiled bacon, and put it down by the fire to keep it warm for the guest, then ran for another plate, knife, and fork, to put on the table. Katie is as thoughtful of the comfort of others as any grown woman could be.

"Something must have gone wrong," observed Charley, when his wife and her guest had quitted the kitchen. "Anne and her niece had better talk over troubles together; I must go and look after poor Cowslip;" so, pushing back his chair from the table, Charley rose and went off to the cow-house.

Katie was very full of guesses as to why her cousin had come through the mud and the rain, and why she seemed to be in such sorrow. We chatted together till Anne reappeared, followed by Carry, oddly dressed in a faded print dress, belonging to her aunt, which was very old-fashioned both in pattern and shape, and at least three inches too wide round the waist.

Carry was soon seated at table; Katie replaced the dish of bacon, and some slices were soon set before

her cousin, but she seemed to have no heart to take food. Carry only drooped her head and murmured, while the tears flowed fast down her cheeks, "I was never suspected before."

"Suspected! who suspects you? What do you mean?" cried Anne.

Carry did not instantly reply; and feeling that my presence might make it more difficult for her to answer the question, I made an attempt to rise from the table. The effort was almost too much for my strength, though Birdie, with her little hands supporting my arm, tried to eke it out with her own. But motion is very painful, and every day seems to make me weaker.

"Don't go, Mr Astwood, I don't mind your hearing; you'll be a true friend," faultered Carry, who observed my little movement. "I have done nothing wrong, I have nothing to hide. No, aunt, I can't take a morsel—it would choke me!" she continued, pushing away the plate, and drawing back from the table.

"I say, what has come over the girl?" cried Anne, who, though ready to show real kindness to those in distress, had no liking for what she called "scenes," and no patience for fanciful woes. "Dry your eyes, and tell us your trouble."

Poor Carry obeyed, and in a voice, which quivered with emotion, began her simple story.

CHAPTER XX.

The Lost Ring.

You knew that Mrs Brierly (that is the name of my mistress), and her little boy are down here on a visit at Weston Hall. Mistress and Master Herbert have a large room at the end of a corridor; I sleep in one of the attics.

I went to my lady, as usual, this morning to help her to dress. Master Herbert had run down to the stables, (he is never happy unless he is playing with horses, dogs, or some other living creature, but that has nothing to do with my tale.) Mistress, after she had finished the rest of her toilette, put on her rings; but her fingers are just now swollen with chilblains, and one of the rings hurt her. It was a beautiful diamond guard-ring, which master had given to her on their marriage.

"I can't wear this," said my lady; "it will not go over the joint of the finger;" and I saw her, with my own eyes, put the ring down on her toilette-table; there could be no mistake about that.

Then said she, "Caroline, mend that rent where I tore my shawl yesterday in the drawer; I shall want the shawl as soon as breakfast is over, so you'd better not come down to prayers,"—there are morning prayers at Weston Hall. And after giving me this order, Mrs Brierly went down stairs.

I took the shawl from the back of her chair; I had sewing materials in the housewife which I keep in my pocket, so I did not require to go away to

fetch them. I went and sat in a window recess in the corridor; for I knew that at that hour I should be in nobody's way, and I had more light at that window to work by than I should have had in my dark little room. I heard the prayer-bell, but I did not go down, as I had to finish my work for my lady.

The rent in the shawl was a long one, and mistress is very particular regarding mending, so I had only just finished my job when I heard the rustle of her dress on the stairs as she came up from breakfast. I rose, and helped to put the shawl round my lady's shoulders, after she had looked at my work; it was so neatly darned that you could hardly have found out the place of the rent. Then mistress passed into her room, and I was just going down stairs to the servants' hall, when I heard my lady call me.

"Caroline, where have you put my diamond ring?"

"I have put it nowhere, ma'am. It is where you left it, upon your toilette-table," said I.

"Come, then, and find it yourself!" cried my lady.

I went in with no misgiving, for I knew that the ring must be there, as no one had entered the room since I had followed my mistress out of it. But look where I might—on the table, the ring-stand, the carpet—the ring was nowhere to be seen!

Then, indeed, I grew dreadfully frightened, and my mistress grew dreadfully angry. She said that the ring must and should be found, that I shouldn't leave the room till I produced it. I got down on my knees to search all over the floor; I hunted in every likely and unlikely place; I turned everything out of the drawers, though it went to reason that the ring which I had myself seen laid down on the toilette-table could not, of its own accord, have rolled into any such place.

Here Carry paused in her story, and I observed, "If no one had entered by the door, are you certain that no one had entered by the window?"

"It would have been impossible to do so," replied Carry. "No one could climb up the bare wall of the house; and even if a person could do so, mistress's room being just over the breakfast-room, any such intruder must have been seen."

"Depend upon it," said Anne, with decision, "the boy Herbert is at the bottom of the mischief. In some silly childish frolic he has made off with his mother's ring."

Carry sadly shook her head. "I heard him shouting after the rabbits in the coach-house as I sat sewing," she said, "for he did not go in to prayers, and had had his breakfast early. Neither he nor any one else entered Mrs Brierly's room after she and I left it; for from my seat in the corridor I had a full view of the door of that room, which no person could reach without actually passing me within a couple of yards' distance."

"Oh! what *can* have become of the ring?" cried Katie, clasping her hands.

"I'd give the world to know!" exclaimed Carry. "Such a morning as I've had of it! After I had hunted and searched until I was dizzy, I was called into the drawing-room to face Sir James and Lady Weston, my mistress sitting on the sofa beside them, for all the world as if I were a criminal brought to be tried!" Carry could hardly speak for sobbing, and it touched my heart to look at the face of my little Katie; it seemed as if all the sorrow and perplexity of her cousin were reflected back from the countenance of the child. "Sir James he threatened," continued Carry, "and his lady she talked of sin and confession, and urged me hard to own that I

had done what I never had done, for I could as soon make the ring as take it! There never was a breath upon my character till now!" and here the poor girl fairly broke down, and buried her face in her hands.

"It's a sad business," said Anne, gravely; "a servant's character is her bread, and, as you are an orphan, you have nothing else to depend on."

I could catch Katie's soft whisper, "Oh! but she shall always share with me."

"And then," continued Anne, "your last mistress has gone abroad, so you can't apply to her for a character. Were you actually turned out of this Weston Hall?" she enquired abruptly. I wished that so painful a question had been more tenderly asked.

"My lady was much excited, and very angry," said poor Carry, half raising her head. "She bade me find the ring or quit the house directly. I couldn't find the ring, so, of course, I left the house; I did not wait to pack up my things. I could not bear to remain another hour where every one was staring at me, and talking of me, and taking me for a thief."

"You had better have packed up your clothes," said the matter-of-fact Anne. "We must send our farm-labourer to fetch them, or perhaps," she added, it seemed to me a little harshly, "you may have so many fine things with you that we may need to send the cart."

I felt great pity for Carry Keith; she appeared to me like a poor butterfly that, in the midst of its gay fluttering, is struck down by a stroke, and lies bruised and helpless in dust. She had no power to struggle against sorrow, she could not keep in her tears. In vain Katie, during the rest of the day, thought of little but how she could cheer and comfort her cousin, and put hope into her heart. My

Birdie was sure and certain that the ring would be found at last; it was "such a little, little thing, it could be hidden in any corner." Carry would neither receive comfort, nor cherish hope. Charley behaved just like himself, and told the poor girl, in the evening, that his home was her home as long as she chose to stay in it.

"Or till she can find another place," interposed Anne, with a warning glance at her husband.

I, like Katie, was full of hope that the jewel would be found; and when, early on the following morning, I heard the gate-bell rung loudly, I felt sure that some messenger had come from Weston Hall with good news. But it was only the cow-doctor, and he came too late, for poor Cowslip had died during the night, to the great vexation of Anne, and the sorrow of my poor little Katie.

So we all met, rather a dull party, at breakfast; Charley, grave; Anne, gloomy; Carry and Katie, with tearful eyes. And then my mind turned to my story for the following Sunday evening. I had not been inclined to write, I had scarcely felt able to write; but the trouble which I saw around me directed my thoughts to a subject. I might, perhaps, do something to soften the sorrow of the poor young maid, to lead her to look through her trial to Him who had sent it. We shall need far more next Sunday than we needed last Sunday, something to make the long winter's evening pass less heavily by. So, again, I take up my Book of CORDS, to write in it after I have closed this chapter of my private journal.

My first story was on the CORDS OF SIN, which every Christian must, through the help of God's grace, break asunder and tread under foot. The next was on the CORD OF LOVE, the motive which must influence the Christian. That was followed by a

story on MISSION CORDS, the object of which is to show how, and in what spirit, a Christian should work for his Master. My theme shall now be the CORDS OF AFFLICTION; and oh! may I be granted power to speak a word of comfort to the afflicted which may find its way to the heart, and show that, indeed, "the darkest cloud has its silver lining!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Cords of Affliction.

"YES, the whole world lieth in wickedness, and it lieth in affliction also," was the sad reflection of Arthur Astwood, the city missionary, as he left his home to visit a great sufferer. He had been requested to do so by Lady Bond, one who considered the poor, and liberally helped them from her purse, though she did not herself visit amongst them.

It was with Arthur one of those periods of depression which come to most, if not to all, men at some time in their lives. His home was no longer what it had been. There had been carried forth from it, on the preceding week, the cold form of her who had once been the delight of his eyes, and the joy of his heart. Arthur had gone again to his work, but he had gone without the spirit to labour, without the hope which makes labour sweet. When the city missionary returned home weary at night, there was none to welcome him back. He missed the hand that had opened the door; he missed the voice that had greeted him; a feeling of desolation came over him as he crossed the silent threshold. Arthur could still look upwards and onwards, but his life had become to him a weary burden, and it was hard then not to long to lay it down and rest.

"*Heavily afflicted,*" "*paralysed from childhood,*" "*alone in the world,*" "*in constant pain from a tumour,*" such was the account given in Lady Bond's note of the state of Lydia Carey, the poor woman

whom she had requested Arthur to visit. The list of trials was a sad one, and it grieved the missionary's soul to think of how many, even in one city, an account as sad could be written.

Stifling and oppressive to Arthur felt the weather as he went forth into the streets, sickening the glare of the sunshine. Everything on which he looked seemed to waken some painful feeling. He passed a hospital; men were bearing towards it a poor sufferer laid on a shutter. Arthur turned his face away; at that moment he shrank from the sight of that pain which he could not relieve, and which he knew to be the lot of so many thousands upon earth. A funeral met the missionary; he turned down a side street, that he might not pass the mournful procession which vividly reminded him of his own recent loss. "What breaking hearts," thought Arthur, "may not those black coaches contain!"

Not far from the lodging of Lydia Carey Arthur passed a large shop, in whose gay window appeared every kind of tempting luxury, preserved meats, soups in tins, pastry, confectionery, expensive dainties brought from all quarters of the world. Looking wistfully into that tempting window stood two little bare-footed children, their pale faces shrunken with hunger, their stunted forms barely covered with rags. "The crumbs from the table of luxury would to them be a feast," thought Arthur, as in bitterness of spirit he went on his way, "but no man giveth unto them. Pain, sickness, poverty, bereavement—these form the lot of mankind. Men are *holden in cords of affliction, fast bound in misery and iron,* and who shall set them free? Oh! may the Lord forgive my unbelief and mistrust; but how hard it is sometimes to realise and feel certain that, notwithstanding all

the misery in the world which He made and governs, GOD IS LOVE."

It was in this unhappy frame of mind that the city missionary turned down a narrow street, and looked for the number of the house at which he had been directed to call. It was not one which lay within the limits of his usual visiting round, and he had never been there before. Arthur was just going to knock at the door when it was opened, and a blind woman, led by a child, came out; the latter had a large volume under her arm.

"Does a person of the name of Lydia Carey live here?" asked the city missionary.

"Yes," the blind woman replied, "she's in the kitchen back; I've just been a sittin' with her."

"Mother goes to Lydia Carey every day," chimed in the child, "'cause she's a teachin' mother to read with her fingers."

"But I thought that the poor creature was ill," observed Arthur, taking from his pocket the note of the lady.

"Oh! yes, she's always ill; she lost the use of her limbs when a child, and she's dreadful bad now," replied the blind woman; "but Lydia Carey, she's one to keep up to the last, and hope to the last, and work to the last. It's a brave heart she has," murmured the blind woman to herself, as she groped her way down the doorstep.

As the door was open, the missionary entered without ringing the bell; and passing down a steep staircase, which was dark as night even on that bright summer's day, he found his way to the back kitchen. Arthur tapped at the door sadly, and was surprised at the cheerful tone of the voice which bade him "come in."

A humble room, indeed, was that into which the

missionary entered. It was almost bare of furniture, and without a scrap of carpet to cover the floor. The window admitted but little light, for the space at the back of the house was so closely shut in by buildings that not an inch of blue sky could be seen by any one within the kitchen, except by going up close to the window, and looking up beyond the dirty brick walls and chimneys which enclosed the place, and gave it the appearance of a prison. The most, however, had been made of the small amount of daylight. The panes of the window were clean, and the bed of the sufferer was near it, so that, on bright days, she had enough of light for reading or working, and Arthur could see distinctly the placid expression of peace on a homely, sickly, pain-worn face. Lydia had a piece of patchwork which she was making spread on the coverlet before her, and was engaged, when Arthur entered, in trying to thread her needle, evidently a somewhat difficult task, for the invalid's eyes were weak, the light feeble, and Lydia Carey's hands trembled with weakness or pain.

"Let me do that for you," said Arthur; and the little act of courtesy served as an introduction. As the missionary gave back the threaded needle, Lydia thanked him with a smile, and neither the visitor nor the visited felt as a stranger towards the other.

The manner and address of Lydia Carey were very superior to those of most of her class. She was not only to a certain degree an educated woman, but, as Arthur soon found, she had that refinement and even poetry of thought which is not usually expected from one sunk in poverty so deep. The missionary formed the conclusion, which knowledge afterwards confirmed, that Lydia had known better days, and had been reduced by sickness to the state of indigence in which he found her.

"'Lady Bond asked me to call and see you, Miss Carey,' said Arthur, as he took his seat on a box which seemed to serve at once as chest, table, and chair."—p. 153.

"Lady Bond asked me to call and see you, Miss Carey," said Arthur, as he took his seat on a box which seemed to serve at once as chest, table, and chair. "She wrote to me that you were heavily afflicted, and thought that you might like to receive a word of comfort from a Christian friend." Arthur looked into the countenance of the sick woman as he said this, and the thought occurred to him that Lydia was perhaps more likely to give comfort to her visitor than to receive it from his lips.

"Lady Bond is so kind and thoughtful," cried Lydia. "She paid for my rent all last month. I wish, oh! how I wish that I could see her to thank her, as I do from the bottom of my heart, for her goodness. I know to whose loving-kindness I owe the help of so generous a friend; it is a gift from Him who hath promised never to leave or forsake us."

Lydia then remained silent for some space of time, evidently expecting the "word of comfort" from one who came avowedly as a religious visitor, but, to the deep mortification of the missionary, he seemed unable to speak. Not even a suitable text would come to his mind; that mind itself appeared to be almost a blank; Arthur shrank from the hypocrisy of talking about God's goodness, when at that moment his faithless, mistrustful heart could not realise it.

The glance of Lydia was quick and keen. Perhaps she read something of what was passing through her visitor's mind, at least it seemed to him that she did so. The sufferer took up the piece of silk patchwork on which she was engaged, and which looked too bright and gay a thing to be found in a dark back kitchen.

"Lady Bond sent me most of these pieces," observed Lydia; "all the black velvet bits are hers."

"The work is beautiful," said Arthur; he had nothing less commonplace to say.

"It would be nothing without the black velvet," remarked Lydia, looking with natural pleasure upon her elegant piece of work, and stroking it gently with her thin hand. "Oh! sir, I am a great deal alone, and have much time for thinking, and so notions come into my head that might never come if I had health and strength to go forth and labour as others do. I've had many a pleasant thought over this work of mine. It seems to me as if all our lives were something like a piece of patchwork; we've the dark bits set against the light, and they serve to throw out the colours; and when the whole work is finished, I mean when earthly trials are ended, we'll see how much of the beauty of the whole was owing to what I call the black velvet bits of our lives."

"I think that some lives are all black," said Arthur, sadly; "like a funeral pall," he added, as he glanced at the crape band round the hat which he held in his hand. The ungrateful repining words were repented of as soon as uttered.

"Surely no Christian's life, sir," replied Lydia; and again Arthur Astwood was struck by the cheerfulness of her tone, though a minute before a sudden contraction of the invalid's brow had told of a sharp pang through her frame.

"You doubtless study and value your Bible," observed the missionary. "The Gospel is indeed full of comfort for those whose hearts are open to receive it."

"Yes, and the wonderful Old Testament stories," cried Lydia. "I have just been reading that of Joseph; and such cheering thoughts came as I read of the cup in Benjamin's sack."

"In what way do you regard that passage of Scripture history as being one to bring comfort?" asked Arthur.

"I may be mistaken, sir; you may think my notions fanciful," replied Lydia, "but I hope, at least, that they are not wrong."

"I should like to hear what your notions are," said the city missionary. "To me there is always a little difficulty in that part of the story; I wonder why Joseph should have put his cup into Benjamin's sack, and caused such misery to the poor lad though but for a time."

"I do not just know why Joseph did so," replied the poor woman; "I daresay that his reasons were good. But Joseph is said to be a type of our Lord, who was, like Joseph, sold for money, and who saved His cruel brethren from death. If Joseph was a type of the Lord, Joseph's brethren, I take it, were types of ourselves, as it was for our sins that the Saviour suffered."

"Granted," observed Arthur Astwood.

"Oh! how beautiful the story is, if we look at it as a picture of Gospel truth, as well as a history of what happened in the old, old time!" cried Lydia. "The sacks, I take it, are our earthly lots. We want them full of blessings; we bring them empty to our Heavenly Brother, and He fills them up to the brim!"

Arthur Astwood felt rebuked by the evident thankfulness with which the poor lonely sufferer spoke of blessings received, when, to the looker-on, it seemed as if she had nothing but trials. "Joseph," observed the missionary, "returned into his brother's sacks the money which they had brought to pay for their corn. This may have been to teach us that all heavenly gifts are free; the Divine Giver bids

us in His Word, *come, buy and eat, without money and without price.*" (Isaiah lv. 1.) "It is easy to gather this lesson from the story of Joseph and his brethren, but I do not yet see the typical meaning of the cup being hidden in Benjamin's sack."

"I never saw it," replied Lydia, "till I noticed in the margin of my Bible (mine is a large reference Bible), that the cup *whereby he divineth* may be read the cup *whereby he maketh trial.* As soon as I noticed that, then the whole meaning of the type seemed to flash on my mind. The cup of trial was Joseph's own cup, the silver cup out of which he drank every day. The cup of trial was our Lord's own cup, of which He spake when He said to the brethren, *Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?*"

"This meaning of the type never occurred to me," observed Arthur. "It is strange how, when studying the Bible, we find new beauties in some passage which we may have read a hundred times without perceiving them before."

"That cup of Joseph caused a great deal of trouble," said Lydia, who had just wiped from her brow the moisture brought by a sharp thrill of pain. "The cup of trial does always bring trouble, yet Joseph had it put in Benjamin's sack. Was it because he loved Benjamin less than the rest of the brethren? Oh! no, no; Benjamin was the dearest of all; it was over him that the heart of Joseph had yearned; it was to him that the largest portion had been given."

"One often hears of Benjamin's portion," remarked Arthur Astwood; "perhaps we should count *the cup of trial* as part of it."

"And perhaps as the *best* part, though it was to be his for a little time only—a very little time,'

murmured Lydia, softly, for pain rendered it difficult for the sufferer to speak. She leant back on her pillow, and only added, "Dear sir, will you pray?"

Arthur Astwood knelt down and prayed earnestly, but it was less for the afflicted child of God than for himself that he prayed, for he felt his need of pardoning grace. He had dared to murmur, not indeed in words, but in heart; and it seemed as if by the mouth of a patient, trustful sufferer, the Saviour were saying to him, as once to the disciples of old, *Ye of little faith, wherefore did ye doubt?*

CHAPTER XXII.

Subject continued.

AFTER leaving with Lydia a gift which Lady Bond had sent through him, the city missionary quitted the dark back kitchen, and again went forth into the streets. But a change had come over his spirit. Instead of hating the glare of the sunshine, every beam which came straight and unbroken for millions of miles, a line of glory streaming from the centre of light, seemed to him to be also a line of love in which was written a tender message from a Heavenly Father to His suffering children below. Arthur looked up and saw the very clouds edged with brightness, and remembered the "silver lining" which the angels above behold.

As Arthur passed the shop in the window of which he had seen so many luxuries displayed for the rich, it was a pleasure to him to find the two half-starved children whom he had noticed before now crouching under the shadow of the wall, laughing and feasting together. Some kind hand had bestowed on the little vagrants stale buns, or some such unwonted dainty. The children were in a state of enjoyment and glee which many a Dives might have envied; Arthur could hear their ringing laughter after he had turned the corner of the street. The sound was pleasant to his ears.

"He who feedeth the ravens hath fed these poor children," thought Arthur, "and hath given them more enjoyment in their simple meal than the

wealthy have in their feasts. He has bestowed food by the hand of human charity, that there may be a double blessing, a blessing on those who receive, and a yet richer on those who give. Were there no poor in the land, how should the charity and the self-denial of the Lord's servants be exercised? He graciously permits them to loosen the cords of affliction, and blesses them for the deed. See yon noble pile," thus Arthur's reflections flowed on as he came in sight of the hospital; "every stone of that building tells of God's goodness in putting into His servants' hearts a desire to care for the sick and needy. Within those walls how much suffering has been relieved! How many have entered the hospital sick and in pain, to leave it thanking Him who, through the skill of man, hath healed all their diseases! The Lord be praised for these palaces of Christian charity, of which so many are raised in this city!"

As Arthur approached his desolate home, remembrance of deeper cause for gratitude arose in his mind. "What would not the anguish of mourners be were it not for that blessed hope of eternal life given to us through our Lord," thought the bereaved widower. "There is no death for the true believer. Separation is bitter, but it is short; they who have been united in Christian love for a time here on earth, will be united in glory for ever!

"'No longer, then, let mourners weep,
Or call departed Christians dead;
For death is hallowed into sleep,
And every grave becomes a bed.

It is not exile—peace on high;
It is not sorrow—rest from strife;
To fall asleep is not to die,
To be with Christ—is better life!'"

The words of the hymn rang like music on the missionary's soul; and he crossed the threshold for the first sime since his great loss without the sense of desolation, and went to an empty room with the Psalmist's words on his lips, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

Subject continued.

On the succeeding day the missionary went to the dwelling of Lady Bond, which was situated in a fashionable square, to give her an account of his visit to Lydia Carey.

What a contrast to the gloomy back kitchen was presented by the home of the wealthy lady! A footman in gorgeous livery opened the door, and a second servant stood in the hall, which was painted and gilded as if it had been the entrance to some goodly palace. Arthur was shown up the broad staircase; the carpet on which he trod was soft as moss to the feet, and beautiful to the eye as the gay parterres of a garden. The room into which the humble city missionary was ushered formed one of a suite of apartments; each seemed more richly furnished than the one before it; there was nothing that appeared gaudy, all was handsome and in good taste. The walls were adorned with beautiful pictures; in other parts mirrors in gilded frames reflected and multiplied every work of art. There was so much to be seen and admired that Arthur could not help asking himself whether all these beautiful things did not, must not contribute much to the happiness of life; whether, as it were, some of the sacks of the brethren below were not filled very much fuller with blessings than those of others.

The room in which Arthur sat was, as has been mentioned, one of a suite; open folding doors only

were between it and the next apartment, which was considerably larger and more splendid. In this apartment sat a lady and a gentleman conversing together, and in tones which made it impossible for Arthur not to hear what was said. The speakers were aware of his presence, for he purposely sat within view; but so humble an individual as a city missionary attracted no attention whatever, and the lady and her companion appeared to talk as freely as if no third person were within hearing.

"I do not think that she is long for this world," said the lady, sadly; "there is no pain, no actual malady, but she is gradually pining away. I fear that dear Lady Bond will not long be amongst us, and never, certainly, was there a human being more fit for the change."

"Has she had medical advice, Maria?" asked the gentleman.

"Advice! oh! that of all the first physicians, but no one seems to be able to do her much good," answered the lady. "She has been to the German baths, has consulted a famous doctor in Paris, as well as the cleverest men in London. All say the same thing. There is no decided disease, but the nervous system is affected. There is a sinking, a depression, which baffles medical skill. Lady Bond is wasting away, and no wonder, for she hardly takes nourishment enough to keep her alive. Sir William does everything to tempt his wife to take food; turtle and every other delicacy which we can think of is placed before her, but appetite is totally wanting. The very sight of food sometimes brings on a feeling of sickness which is distressing."

"All that you tell me is very sad," observed the gentleman, gravely. "Do you think that anything is weighing upon Lady Bond's mind? It is won-

derful how the bodily health is affected by the state of the spirits. Has my poor cousin lately had any severe affliction?"

"Not lately, at least none that I know of," replied the lady, "and I am so constantly with her that I must have heard of any recent cause of trouble. Five or six years ago Lady Bond lost her baby, the only child that she ever had, and I do not think that she has ever recovered from the effects of this trial. She feels her life to be joyless and objectless; she is able to settle to no occupation. Kind and good and liberal she is, as she always has been; she would on no account leave a duty neglected; but Lady Bond cannot take strong interest in anything. As I said before, I fear that my dear friend is gradually wasting away."

Arthur looked on the costly ornaments around him, the fine pictures and elegant furniture, with an utterly altered feeling. These things but gilded the cords of affliction, nay, perhaps were making their pressure more painful. Was it not more than possible that the poor bereaved mother, had she been a poor woman and obliged to go out charing, or to ply her needle at home, instead of reclining on a velvet sofa, weeping over her loss and her own broken health, would actually have suffered far less? Might not work have done more to calm her nerves and divert her mind than all that doctors could do? The fretting rust upon steel destroys its brightness more than the heavy blow. More evenly than man would suppose at first sight is the corn of blessings measured into the sacks of those whom the Lord deigns to call His brethren, and more or less deeply hidden the silver cup of trial is placed in the lot of all.

Such were the reflections of Arthur Astwood.

They were interrupted by the entrance of Lady Bond, a tall, graceful woman, very pale and thin, with ill-health and sadness marked on her face, and listless languor shown in her manner.

The missionary rose on the lady's coming in, but she motioned to him to resume his seat, and herself took her place on the sofa. Lady Bond held a fan in her hand, and a beautiful little scent-bottle hung by a jewelled ring from her finger. Propped by velvet cushions sat the gentle invalid lady, looking like a drooping, fading lily. Arthur thought of Lydia Carey passing days of loneliness and nights of pain in her dark back kitchen, and asked himself which of the two Christian women was really most to be pitied.

Arthur Astwood, at Lady Bond's request, gave a short account of his visit to the afflicted woman to whom she had sent relief by his hands. Lady Bond listened with interest; the tears rose into her gentle eyes as she heard of so much suffering borne with so much patience.

"Is there anything else that I can do for her?" asked the lady, earnestly, when the city missionary had finished his simple account.

"Lydia Carey is very anxious to see her benefactress, and thank her herself for all past kindness," Arthur ventured to reply.

"Oh! that is impossible," said Lady Bond, mournfully, shaking her head. "I have not strength nor spirits to visit amongst the poor. The sight of misery would crush me!"

"If I might presume to mention my own feelings, madam," said Arthur, "the sight of Lydia Carey had an opposite effect upon me. There is nothing in the sufferer's appearance to shock, nothing in her humble dwelling to disgust. The

place is clean and quiet, and I cannot help thinking"—Arthur wondered at his own boldness in pressing the point—"I cannot help thinking that a visit, however short, from one to whom Lydia owes so much, would be to the afflicted servant of God a pleasure—a very great pleasure."

"I do not feel as if I could make the effort of going," said Lady Bond, gently stirring the air with her fan. "I am myself, as you may see, Mr Astwood, in very poor health. I am most ready and glad to give money, but,"—the lady did not finish her sentence, so the missionary once again spoke.

"Allow me to say, madam, that there are some amongst the poor, and I believe that Lydia may be counted in the number of these, to whom personal kindness and sympathy are more precious than anything that money can buy. She is lonely and sick as well as needy, and to such a sufferer a visit from a Christian lady is sometimes welcome almost as one from an angel might be. A few words of kindness from your own lips would be often gratefully recalled, and would probably tend to soothe hours of wakefulness and pain."

"You say that the place where Lydia lives is very quiet and clean," said Lady Bond, in a hesitating tone. Arthur saw that he was making some little impression.

"The street looks quiet and respectable," he replied; "Lydia lives in a back kitchen, dark and almost unfurnished, but it seemed to be perfectly clean."

"Could you go with me, Mr Astwood?" asked the lady, looking very nervous and uneasy, as though she were trying to summon up courage for an effort most trying and painful. "I would call for you in

my carriage; I could not—no, I could not possibly go by myself."

"If you will appoint any time, madam, I shall most gladly be at your command," replied Arthur.

Lady Bond sighed, then opened and raised her scent-bottle, and the sweet perfume from it filled the apartment. "That fragrance comes from *crushed* flowers," thought Arthur; "the blossoms have been bruised that their sweetness may give refreshment to those who need it. Thus is it with many a mourner on earth. Those who sorrow themselves may help to make many rejoice."

It was with a good deal of hesitation and uncertainty that Lady Bond made an appointment to call for the city missionary the following day, and accompany him to the dwelling of Lydia Carey. There was an evident conflict in the poor lady's mind, between pity for the afflicted, with a conscientious wish to fulfil every Christian duty, and extreme disinclination to making what was to her an unwonted and painful effort. Lady Bond found it very difficult indeed to make up her mind, and Arthur Astwood left her presence, feeling very uncertain whether, when the appointed hour arrived, it would bring the lady herself, or a note of excuse to tell him that she could not fulfil her engagement.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Subject continued.

ARTHUR ASTWOOD had waited for about half-an-hour beyond the time appointed, when, to his no small pleasure, he saw the elegant carriage of Lady Bond approaching his humble dwelling. The next minute he was at the door of the carriage, and saw Lady Bond within it, looking very nervous and ill. With a trembling hand she motioned to Arthur to take his place on the seat opposite to her own, and she then told the footman, who let down the steps, whither she wished to go. It is probable that so handsome an equipage had never before stopped at any door in the narrow street in which Lydia Carey resided.

"Mr Astwood, this is a great effort to me," said the lady, faintly.

"It is one, madam, which I believe that you will never regret," he replied.

"I am so vexed—I have forgotten my purse!" said Lady Bond, who had been nervously fumbling in a little embroidered bag; "I have no money to give."

"Perhaps your visit may be almost more gratifying if you do not bring money," suggested the missionary. And as Lady Bond looked perplexed at his words, he added, "Yesterday your liberality relieved Lydia Carey from want; to-day she needs nothing but sympathy, and the pleasure of seeing you."

Arthur Astwood helped Lady Bond to alight at the door of the poor woman's lodging.

"Pray, go first, and show me the way, and do not leave me," murmured the invalid, as she laid her hand on the missionary's arm. That small hand trembled in its delicate light kid glove.

The frost of age was on the missionary's head; but during the whole course of his long experience he had never met with a case just like that of the lady at his side. The nervous shrinking with which she receded from what appeared to him so simple and natural an act as that of visiting a respectable poor person, made him feel how little we can judge of the peculiar difficulties and temptations of others. The Lord only knows all, and has compassion on the infirmities as well as on the sins of His people.

"Must I go down there—it is as dark as the grave!" murmured the invalid lady, as she stood at the top of the staircase which led down to the kitchen floor.

"I will go first, madam, and count the steps; there is some light below," replied her conductor.

Lady Bond slowly descended; Arthur Astwood could hear her faint nervous sigh behind him. He tapped at the door of Lydia's room, and then opening it, ushered in the trembling visitor.

"Introduce me, please; tell her who I am," whispered the lady.

"Lady Bond has heard of your wish to see her, Lydia, and though far from well, has come here herself," said the city missionary.

An expression of great pleasure lighted up the sickly countenance of the sufferer, though she only uttered the words, "How kind!"

Arthur cleared from the box beside Lydia's bed a Bible and a medicine phial, in order that the guest

might have the box to sit on. The folds of the lady's silken garments covered the rude seat, and lay on the carpetless floor. There was no pride in the wearer; as far as man could judge, the heart of Lady Bond was quite as lowly as that of the sufferer whom her charity had relieved. It was not because she despised the poor that Lady Bond had hitherto never gone near them; she was actually shy and embarrassed in the dark kitchen of Lydia Carey, though she would probably have borne herself with graceful ease in the drawing-room of the Queen.

"You will speak to her for me," said Lady Bond in a low tone to Arthur Astwood; the lady apparently did not know what to say.

"Lydia, I need hardly tell you that Lady Bond feels much for your sufferings," said the missionary, who found it necessary to break the silence which ensued. "But I think that you can tell her that you find by experience that your Master can give peace in deep tribulation. You do not find it so terrible a thing to be bound in the cords of affliction."

"I did once, I did once," replied Lydia. "I murmured, I rebelled, I struggled against these cords till they cut me, as it were, to the bone. It was long, very long, before I found anything like peace—before I could learn to lie still in those bonds, and not struggle."

"We may not struggle, but we may *sink*," said Lady Bond, faintly; the large tears were filling her eyes, and she drooped her head as she spoke.

"We can hardly sink, dear lady, if we cling to the Saviour," said Lydia, who from her bed of pain looked on her benefactress with grateful respect, not unmixed with compassion. "When we do that, we have reached the fourth holy stage of which the good clergyman told me."

"What stage—what do you mean?" asked the lady. Lydia appeared a little unwilling to go on, but was encouraged by a look from the missionary, who stood near, leaning with his back against the wall. He felt that words from these pale, parched lips, and spoken in that dark and comfortless chamber, might fall as healing balm upon a wounded and bleeding heart.

"A clergyman who used to come and see me—he has gone to his rest now—told me of something that he had read in some old, old book * about the six stages, as he called them, in the experience of a Christian," said Lydia, speaking with difficulty, for the drops on her brow told of very great pain. "I have often thought over his words, and asked myself, At what stage am I now?"

"Tell me what the clergyman told you, if it do not weary you to do so," said Lady Bond, who was becoming more tranquil and composed. There is something that stills the soul in the very presence of any one who lives very close to the Lord. Moses wist not that his face shone when he came down from the Mount; but those who looked on him saw it, and their faith was doubtless strengthened by this visible effect of close communion with the Most High. If there be so little of holy brightness now beheld in the servants of God, is it not because their infirmities, their want of simple faith and devoted love, throw, as it were, a veil even over sincere piety, so that a Christian can too often scarcely be distinguished from a man of the world?

* This book I have never seen, nor am I sure even of its title. The bare outline of its design was given to me by an aged Christian lady, and I thought that outline so beautiful that I have tried to trace it out with my own pencil, to make it, as it were, more visible to others who would otherwise never see it at all.—*A. L. O. E.*

"I am afraid that I shall not remember all quite correctly," said Lydia Carey, raising her hand to her forehead; "but I will repeat what I heard as well as I can. The *first stage* of a Christian's experience is when a poor sinner reaches the cross; that is to say, when she feels that she is in herself helpless and guilty, and looks to the blood of the Saviour, and to that only, for pardon and peace. This is the very first stage. The sinner *believes* that she may come to *the everlasting Father*,* and by Him be *in no wise cast out.*"†

Lady Bond slightly bowed her head in assent. There could be no doubt that the lowly lady, as well as the patient sufferer beside her, had reached that stage of experience.

"Then the *second* is when the Christian finds the track of the Father's footsteps to guide her on her heavenward way," continued Lydia. "The Lord, who said, COME TO ME, said also, FOLLOW ME; the first thing to be done is to *come* in *faith*, and the next thing, to try to *follow* in *holiness*."

As Lydia paused, and gasped as if for breath. Arthur Astwood took up the word, in order to give her time to recover.

"I believe that the first stage is always followed by the second," he observed. "No man can really come to Christ for forgiveness of all his sins without seeking to follow Him in that *holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.*"‡

"But this stage is often a dark stage," resumed Lydia Carey. "It was so for a long time with me. I was seeking the Father, but it seemed as if I never could find Him; that though His foot-prints could be tracked on the way, to keep me from any great wandering, yet that He Himself was very far off. There

* Isaiah ix. 6. † John vi. 37. ‡ Hebrews xii. 14.

was little comfort for my soul until I reached, as I trust, the *third stage.*"

"And what is the third stage in a Christian's experience?" asked Lady Bond, with interest.

"Oh, just when the poor weak child has found the Father, and taken hold of His hand, and feels that He is quite near; when she can speak to Him in prayer, and hear His answers in His Word. That is the stage of ready *obedience.* The child can go leaping and rejoicing on her way if she has hold, firm hold of the Father's hand."

"But sore troubles and painful difficulties will arise," observed Lady Bond, sadly, for she seemed unable to realise the idea of leaping and rejoicing. "Even the Christian may have to pass through very deep waters, and her footsteps may slide and slip, and her strength give way." The poor lady's voice trembled with emotion as she spoke.

"That only brings her to the *fourth stage* of a Christian's experience, dear lady," said Lydia Carey, "that of clinging in trust to a Father's arm. Distress drives her closer, still closer, to Him; she hangs, as it were, all her weight upon His everlasting strength. Blessed are the trials, blessed the difficulties, which bring the child of God to this stage of experience."

Lady Bond's tears flowed fast, and Lydia looked distressed at the effect of what she had spoken.

"I have said too much—forgive me, dear lady, I never meant to agitate you," she cried; "I will say nothing more."

"Oh no—go on, go on—it does not distress me—it does me good," was the almost sobbed-forth reply. "I want to hear of the two last stages in a Christian's experience; they must be the most blessed of all."

"The *fifth* is when the poor, weary, helpless child is raised on the Father's shoulder, even as the sheep in the parable was on that of the shepherd," said Lydia. "When the child can no longer walk, when the waters are too deep for her weak feet to ford, then the Father raises her up, and carries her. This is rest, this is *peace!* In this is fulfilled the promise which our Lord made to His disciples, *Peace I leave you, My peace I give unto you.* This lifting aloft, this bearing on the shoulder, is joy in tribulation, rest in the midst of the waves of trouble."

Lady Bond dried her eyes. "And you have known this?" she enquired.

"Sometimes—a little of it," replied Lydia Carey; "I hope to know more—much more—as I draw more near to my Home. I believe that it is often the experience of the Christian when passing through what is called the dark valley, but which cannot be dark to the child whom the Father carries through it." There was joy in the sufferer's tone, as she glanced upwards for a moment, as if she knew that she was approaching the Home of which she had spoken.

"And what is the *last* stage in a Christian's experience?" asked Lady Bond, who was now quite calm.

"Oh! it is not to be known in this world, not to be imagined in this world!" exclaimed Lydia. "Eye hath not seen, nor heart conceived the bliss of the child safe at home, and resting for ever and ever upon the bosom of eternal Love!"

A long silence followed the last word, which each one present seemed to be unwilling to break. The missionary thought of his wife, of her who had already passed through every stage of a Christian's

experience. He had dared to murmur in his heart, because she had now reached the last! Arthur knew not what might be passing through the minds of those beside him, but his own thoughts took the form of a prayer that he might be forgiven for the ingratitude and rebellion which had darkened his spirit, and which made him half forget that his own loss was eternal gain to her whom he so dearly had loved.

Unwilling as Lady Bond had been to visit the kitchen of Lydia Carey, she appeared to be now in no haste to quit it. The lady was evidently soothed and comforted by what she saw of the power of the Christian religion to support the soul even under the heaviest trials. She who had come to water was being watered herself. Lady Bond presently enquired of Lydia what had first led her to take such a calm and happy view of religion, whether with her the change from murmuring and struggling to peace and resignation had been sudden or gradual.

"I think that it was very gradual," said Lydia in reply. "I can recall no particular time when I first found peace in believing. Perhaps it came from my being so very lonely, so much left to myself, with nothing to turn my thoughts from the Saviour. I could not help remembering how He was led before Pilate, bound with cords for our sakes; and *He did not struggle,* He did not murmur, as I had done when bound with the cords of affliction. *He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.* The Lord's cords were loosened, indeed, but they were taken off that He might be raised on a *cross;* when ours are taken off it will be that we may be raised to a *throne.* His blessed hands were freed from the cords to be pierced by

the nails; to ours the palm and the golden harp will be given, through His boundless mercy, to sinners! Can we think of these wonders of grace, and find it impossible to rejoice even in deep tribulation?"

Lydia was now evidently exhausted by so long a conversation, and Lady Bond rose to depart.

"I will come again—perhaps to-morrow," said the lady, "if my visits are not too much for your strength. I fear that I have greatly wearied you to-day."

"You have greatly cheered me," replied Lydia Carey, with a grateful smile; "it is such a pleasure to see you."

As Lady Bond mounted the dark, steep staircase, she said to Arthur, "Do you think that Lydia would like me to bring some trifle from my own table, something more delicate than she could procure in this wretched place?"

"Such a proof of your considerate kindness would, I am sure, be most welcome, madam," replied Arthur. "You have sent her some soup already."

"*Sent*, but not *taken* it to her myself," observed the lady; "I feel that there is a wide difference between the two actions. I fear," she added, meekly, as she crossed the pavement to go to her carriage, "I fear that I have hitherto been sadly neglectful of my duty towards my poorer brethren."

CHAPTER XXV.

Subject concluded.

TIME sped on. Arthur Astwood repeatedly visited Lydia Carey, but not in the dark back kitchen in which he had seen her first. Three days after the visit from Lady Bond, the invalid was removed to a room on another floor by the kindness of her benefactress, a room furnished in a manner simple but comfortable, and where the daylight came freely in. Arthur only once chanced to meet Lady Bond in the invalid's new apartment, but never did he quit it after any visit without hearing that lady's name mentioned in terms of heartfelt gratitude. It was evident that the wealthy lady was often to be seen in the sufferer's humble abode.

The month of October had arrived when Arthur Astwood had received an invitation to spend a day at Clarence Lodge, the country seat of Sir William and Lady Bond. He was asked to be present at a treat to some Sunday-school children who had been kindly invited from London. The city missionary had few opportunities of breathing pure country air, and thankfully availed himself of this.

Pleasant was the sight of two large vans crowded with bright, happy children. It was refreshing to hear laughter, shouting, and song from beneath the awning, as fifty or sixty poor children, gathered from dull alleys and dusty courts, set off, full of glee, to enjoy the one great treat of the season.

"What a vast amount of innocent pleasure is en-

joyed within the narrow space of those two vans!" thought Arthur to himself, as he prepared to follow by train. "There are hearts as light as though they had never known a care, though their possessors scarcely know where they will get a meal on the morrow! That mirth is real, not feigned; those shouts are the outward expression of glee that cannot be repressed. It must, indeed, be a pleasant thing to cause so much pleasure to others; it must warm the heart and gladden the spirits to be able to spread a table for so many poor!"

Arthur felt this more forcibly still when, after his arrival at Clarence Lodge, he stood on the velvet lawn at the back of the noble mansion, under the splendid trees, that were gay with the tints of autumn. The poor little children from London, like birds let loose from a cage, were playing around. Some enjoyed a swing which was hung between two trees, and screamed half with fear and half with delight, as they mounted high into the air; others engaged in round games, cricket, or racing over the velvety turf; while not a few found sufficient amusement in watching the liveried servants making preparations for their rural feast on the lawn.

Leaning on the arm of her husband, and evidently, in her own quiet way, greatly enjoying the scene around her, Lady Bond moved from group to group, with a smile and a kind word for each. The lady still looked delicate and pale, as one who had known much sickness or trial; but her step had now become firmer, and her brow more serene, and she no longer wore the appearance of a drooping, broken-hearted woman. Lady Bond was now able not only to give, but to receive pleasure. Arthur noticed her stooping to ask some question of a merry, roguish-looking urchin who was pulling daisies on the lawn.

and his reply, whatever it might be, evidently amused the kind lady. She burst into a soft, silvery laugh as she patted the little one's curly head, and then taking the tiny nosegay of daisies from the child, gave in return her own bouquet of rich hot-house flowers. The boy was surprised and delighted at the exchange, and Lady Bond appeared scarcely less so, as she placed the daisies in her bosom. "Ah! the childless lady feels herself to be no longer childless," thought Arthur, "the Good Shepherd has given to her so many of His lambs to feed."

Though the scene on the lawn was so bright and cheering, Arthur felt a desire to turn aside into one of the shady paths of the woodland that lay behind it. There the wide-spreading branches of oak, beech, and elm formed a canopy above more beautiful than any that the hand of man could frame, while fallen leaves, lovely in decay, strewed the mossy paths, and formed a carpet of green, crimson, and gold. The silence, the beauty of the forest scene, invited the steps of the city missionary; he sauntered slowly along, inhaling the sweet, fresh air which breathed of purity and peace.

After some time spent in the wood, in a spirit of silent praise, Arthur turned back towards the lawn, guided by the sound of the children's happy voices. Just as he left the shade of the trees he heard some one gently calling his name, and turning, saw in a bath-chair, well propped up by cushions, the wasted, paralysed form of Lydia Carey. The invalid bore the appearance of one not very far from the grave; the stamp of wasting disease was even more apparent now as she sat in the golden sunshine than it had been when she lay in the dark back kitchen. But none amongst all the gay groups, whose sports

she was watching, looked—or probably felt—happier than Lydia Carey.

"It is a pleasant surprise to find you here," said the city missionary; "I should not have thought that your strength was equal to the fatigue of spending a day in the country. Do you return this evening to your home?"

"My home is no longer in London," replied Lydia, with a beaming smile; "and I have no journey before me save one to a resting-place yet more bright and beautiful than this. Oh! Mr Astwood," she continued, turning her eyes with an expression of loving gratitude towards her benefactress, who was standing at a little distance, "was it not good in Lady Bond to bring me here to her own delightful home, that I might enjoy country air and quiet? How wonderfully, oh! how wonderfully, has the Giver of good cared for His poor, unworthy servant!"

"Yet I fear that you are still in great suffering," observed Arthur Astwood; "you have not yet been called to cast away the cords of affliction, as you will be at last."

"And perhaps soon,' replied Lydia, joyfully, glancing up at the clear, cloudless sky above her "And then—then shall I know, indeed, that which I now believe from my heart, that God gives His children some of the sweetest drops of comfort out of the silver cup of trial, and deigns to bind them more closely unto Himself by the painful

CORDS OF AFFLICTION."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Good News.

WHETHER the simple little tale which I read aloud yesterday evening had the effect of soothing the trouble of poor Carry Keith, I am scarcely able to say. She herself was not long to be bound in her cords of affliction. It is a pleasure to me to write down in my journal the events of this day,—a pleasant day it has been to us all at Beechwood Farm.

Thaw had again been followed by frost and snow. "The world looks like one big wedding-cake," my Katie merrily observed when she greeted me in the morning. Birdie donned her tartan cloak, put her school-book and slate into her neat little bag, and prepared to start off for school.

Anne came into the kitchen in which Carry and I were sitting, with her arms filled with a huge bundle of sacking, piled up to her very chin.

"What's all that brought here for?" asked I.

"I thought that Carry would be glad to make herself useful," replied matter-of-fact Anne. "These old sacks only want a bit of stitching and mending to be as good as ever. Charley had meant to buy new ones; but as we've lost poor Cowslip, we shall need to look after our money. Here," continued the frugal housewife, emptying her arms upon Carry's lap, "stitching is better than moping. I suppose that you've brought your thimble with you, and here is a strong good needle and thread."

Poor Carry, I thought, looked down at the coarse

work before her with something very much like disgust. The lady's-maid's fingers, accustomed to handle delicate silks and fine linen, seemed altogether unsuited for the task of mending old sacks. Carry said nothing, indeed, but raised her eyebrows and shoulders a little, and glanced at me.

"I'll help you, dear, as soon as ever I come home," cried Katie, going up to her cousin and kissing her. "Many hands make light work, as grandad often tells us."

Carry, who had no spirit to decline the task which her aunt had set her, rose with the sacking in her arms to proceed with it to the parlour, the room in which she and I usually sat except at meal-time. But Anne stopped her niece with a peremptory gesture.

"What are you after, child?" she said sharply. "You don't suppose that I'm going to have my parlour strewn with rubbish. I should never get the chaff out of the carpet. Can't you stop where you are? You're not too fine, I suppose, to work in a farmer's kitchen."

Carry sat down again, her face crimson, and her eyes brimming over with tears. The poor girl was finding the bread of dependence bitter indeed. I was about to say something in her behalf, when Birdie, who had gone to the window to strew crumbs for the robins before she started for school, exclaimed, "Here's a carriage coming up our lane."

The snow, lying thick on the ground, so deadened the sound of hoofs and wheels that the carriage had stopped at our gate almost before we knew that a vehicle was approaching. If a visitor at Beechwood Farm be a rare thing, a visitor coming in a carriage was a thing hitherto unheard of, so that Katie stood staring with surprise at seeing a lady and a little

boy alighting at the gate. Carry started up from her seat with the exclamation, "It's my lady herself!" dropping all the sacking on the floor as she did so, and instinctively shaking and stroking her black silk skirt, to remove the dust and the chaff.

"Quick, child, show them into the parlour, I'll be down in a minute," cried Anne.

I could not help smiling as the farmer's wife hurried upstairs: I felt sure that when Anne reappeared, it would be in the black poplinet dress which she never wears but on Sundays.

Carry, evidently nervous and anxious, went to meet her mistress, and show her into the parlour. I was desirous to follow, for I felt great interest in the poor young maid, and must plead guilty to something like curiosity also, for it was not likely to be a mere chance that had brought the lady to our farm. Birdie looked eagerness itself, but she saw her old grandfather's painful effort to rise, and would not leave him to crawl on alone.

"I'm sure there will be good news of the ring, I've been praying so hard," cried my darling, as she put forth all the strength of her little arms to prop me up on the one side, after giving me my sturdy staff to stay my steps on the other.

"Was it not jolly funny!" was the exclamation from little Herbert Brierly which we heard as Katie and I slowly entered the parlour, into which the visitors had been shown.

Mrs Brierly is a pretty, fashionable-looking lady, with what appeared to me to be rather an affected manner. One would never have supposed from her appearance that she could have been roused to anything like the anger which had been excited against poor Carry by the loss of the diamond ring. The lady was laughing a little when Katie and I entered,

and took no notice whatever of us, except by a slight movement of the head. Carry stood before her mistress, her face half smiles and half tears.

"Was it not jolly funny?" repeated Herbert, a merry black-eyed boy. "To think of the cunning squirrel playing at hide-and-seek like that!"

"You see, my little man, what comes of your bringing in pets from the woods," said the lady, stroking her white ermine muff. "It was bad enough to have the wild brute running under one's feet, climbing up the curtains, biting the cornice, playing all manner of tricks; I'd no notion that thieving was one of them. It was really exceedingly funny."

It may have been funny to Mrs Brierly and the squirrel, but it certainly had been anything but amusing to poor Carry Keith. The girl looked older and thinner already from the trouble which the prank of the pet had caused her.

"Pray, madam, may I ask how the ring was discovered at last?" I enquired.

The lady looked rather doubtful whether an old man had a right to address her at all; but her little boy eagerly answered instead of his mother.

"I'll tell you how it all happened. Just the day before this row about the ring I found a sick squirrel in the wood—I suppose that the cold had nipped it. I brought it to our room—mamma's room—and gave it wine in a spoon, and it soon got frisky enough, jumped from chair to chair, and scrambled up the bell-rope! I meant to put the jolly little chap in a cage as soon as ever I could get one, for mamma didn't like its running about, though I thought it capital fun to watch it. I gave it lots of nuts; some it cracked and ate so prettily, sitting on the top of the bed, with its bushy tail curled over

its back. I did not know what the little rogue did with the rest of the nuts, for I had never had a squirrel before, and was not up to its funny, sly ways. What do you think?" the boy laughed merrily as he went on with his account; "the rogue was collecting a little store for himself at the top of the window-curtain, just where the folds were gathered close together on the brass bar."

"It seems to be the instinct of the creature to hoard and to hide," observed Mrs Brierly.

"It may be its way to hoard nuts," laughed her boy; "but I should not have thought that a squirrel would have cared for a diamond; it could not crack *that* and eat it; perhaps it just took it for a dew-drop. A fine new cage came from London for my squirrel this morning," continued the boy, addressing himself to Birdie, who seemed to be listening to the story with her eyes as well as her ears; "master squirrel had no fancy for a cage, so it clambered up to its perch at the top of the window-curtain, and looked down on us with its roguish eyes, as if to say, 'You can't catch me!' I took hold of the curtain directly, and gave it a good hard shake, and down tumbled—not the saucy little squirrel, but the nuts and the diamond ring! Oh! didn't I laugh to see it!"

"I was so glad to recover my jewel!" said Mrs Brierly.

I could not help thinking that a poor servant's recovering her character was a greater cause for gladness, and that it would have been only natural for the lady to express some regret at having accused her unjustly. But the idea of doing so did not seem to enter into Mrs Brierly's mind.

"So now you may return with me, Caroline," said the mistress, with an air of condescension.

"I will take you back in the carriage; your box must be sent in a cart. I have a great deal of work for you to do; it has been excessively inconvenient to me to be without a maid for a week."

Carry curtseyed and left the parlour, followed by Katie; and a short interval ensued, which was apparently employed by Mrs Brierly in counting the ermine tails on her muff, and by Master Herbert in climbing on a chair to examine more closely an open case of stuffed birds. Not content with staring at them, he must handle them also; and either from his over-balancing himself, or from his foot slipping on the horse-hair cover of the chair, down came the boy—case, stuffed birds, and all—with a crash which made his mother start with alarm, and caused a loud exclamation from Anne, who entered the room at that moment.

Herbert jumped up with a cheerful "not a bit hurt!" which was more than could be said either of the case, or of the favourite stuffed canary, or the pretty Indian parrot. Anne looked with indignant surprise at the ruined case, while Mrs Brierly rather peevishly said, "You must really be more careful, Herbert; my nerves won't stand these snocks;" and as Carry appeared at the door in her bonnet, the lady rose from her seat, and with a slight stiff bow to Anne, went off with her son to her carriage.

Anne was at first almost too angry to speak. When she did so it was in broken sentences, uttered with indignant emphasis.

"Well—if ever!—she calls herself a lady, does she? if ever she come here again, I'll give her a bit of my mind!" and my daughter-in-law set herself to assist Birdie, who had followed Carry downstairs, and who was on her knees picking up fragments of

wood and feathers, while she gave her mother, at the same time, an animated account of the squirrel's hiding the ring.

"I shall be very late for school!" exclaimed Katie, as she rose from her knees, and her eyes chanced to glance at the clock.

"You cannot go to school, child, this morning," said Anne, "so you had better take off your cloak. You will have enough to do to set things straight, for one might think," she added sternly, as she looked at the numerous footprints left by Herbert on her carpet, "you might think that a pack of wild Hottentots or Red Indians had been in my parlour!" and turning angrily away, Anne proceeded upstairs to change her poplinet dress.

"Oh! grandad!" cried Katie, running up to me, and putting her soft little arms round my neck, "are you not pleased, are you not delighted that the diamond ring is found, and poor Carry happy again?"

"I'm heartily glad, my darling," said I.

"It almost seems," observed Katie, more slowly (her head was resting on my shoulder as she spoke), "it almost seems as if all her grief and trouble had been for nothing at all, for everything will go on with her now just the same as if the ring had never been lost. Don't you think—is it naughty to think—that Carry might have been spared all that grief?"

"Nay, Birdie, no one is ever bound, even for one hour, in the cords of affliction without some wise reason for it," I replied. "Even after the cords are removed, they never leave us just the same as if nothing had happened. Sorrow either hardens the heart (this is its effect upon those who struggle and rebel like Pharaoh), or it makes the heart softer and better."

"Ah! I see," said Birdie. "Do you know, grandad, that the first, the very first thing which Carry did when she went up to her little room was to fall on her knees, and cover her face? I daresay that she was returning thanks for the finding of the ring. And when Carry got up, she gave me a tight kiss, and said that she had learned a lesson of faith and trust which she would never, never forget. And then Carry kissed me again, and said that she would always remember my father's kindness, and mine also, and that she felt the truth of the proverb—'A friend in need is a friend indeed.'"

So now having scribbled down in my journal the pleasant events of this morning, I will turn to my Sunday story. Carry's words to my Birdie on "a friend in need" has directed me to a subject. There are few things more beautiful than Christian friendship, and I met with a remarkable example of it in my earlier days, which I shall now like to record.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Cord of Friendship.

"THEY are so unlike each other, indeed they are such contrasts, that it appears strange that Will Robins and Paul Eerie should have ever become such fast friends!"

The observation was made by Mary Astwood, a gentle and very pleasing young maiden, who had accompanied her brother Arthur and his family to Canada, where they were residing together in a log-hut in a clearing. Already active fingers had given to the rude dwelling something of the appearance of home. The walls of the house might be rough and unpapered, but a few prints from the old country were hung upon them, with little neatly-framed photographs of friends far away. There was no plaster to hide the timbers of the roof, but the little lamp, suspended from one of them, cast as cheerful a light as if it had been a chandelier of cut glass hanging from a gilded ceiling. A busy, happy family group were assembled around the table of Arthur's own making, engaged in the homely occupation of restuffing a mattress brougnt from the old country with fresh flock from the new. There were no shops within reach, so Astwood had to be carpenter, joiner, smith, and builder, in one; while his wife Katherine and his fair young sister practised as many professions as he did. But high health, cheerful spirits, and family love made labour a pleasure to the settlers, and there were perhaps few spots upon earth

more bright with happiness than the emigrants' home.

Nor was the place quite lonesome. When Astwood on Sundays held a little service in his log-hut, his room was always well filled. There were three other dwellings within half-a-mile of his own, and their inmates were glad of such an opportunity of meeting in social worship. There is nothing like union in prayer to keep neighbours in harmony with each other. If any slight bickerings took place during the week, all was made up on Sundays, when, instead of the noise of the axe and the hammer, rose the sound of familiar hymns first heard in some dear old church in England.

The four families did not form the whole of the little congregation that assembled at Forest Cot on Sundays. As surely as the holy day came round, and pretty often on other days besides, there appeared two settlers from Wild-copse, a very lonesome place, about five miles distant, on the other side of a forest. These settlers were Will Robins and Paul Eerie,—emigrants from the same county as the Astwoods; and it was of them that Mary was speaking when she made the observation with which my story opens.

"Yes, it is strange," replied Katherine Astwood; "for certainly you could hardly find two men of tempers more different than Paul Eerie and Robins. Eerie is the most flighty person that ever I met with in my life, more like a whimsical child than a sensible man."

"His spirits are very uncertain," said her husband.

"They sometimes mount up to the sky; Paul seems to be scarcely able to control his mad fancy for frolic," cried Mary. "One can hear his laugh half-

a-mile off,—I expect him to go head over heels any minute, to give a vent to his glee. Then, without rhyme or reason, Paul is down in the depths of gloom; so moody that he will scarcely speak, and is ready to take offence at anything—or at nothing! I think that it must be no small trial to have to live always with such a capricious companion as Paul."

"One certainly can never count upon Eerie," observed Mrs Astwood. "He is very clever and quick, and when in a mood to work no one works better than he. But he tires so soon of everything! There's the nice arm-chair which he promised to make for us," she glanced towards an unfinished piece of furniture in a corner of the room; "how skilfully he began to carve it! but unless you, Arthur, put a fourth leg to the chair, I fear that it will have to stand upon three till it falls into decay."

"Robins has to finish everything that Eerie begins," remarked Astwood, who had more than once visited Wild-copse. "If any one could keep the wild young fellow to steady work, it would be Will Robins, who is a man to go through with whatever he once undertakes; but it would be as easy to break in a leopard to draw a lady's garden-chair as to make Paul Eerie act for two days together like a rational being. I never have met with any other man so full of freaks and fancies."

"And yet one cannot help liking him!" exclaimed Katherine Astwood. "Paul is a kind, generous-hearted fellow, and so good to my little Charley! I do not care, however," she added, "to have my little ones much with Paul Eerie, lest in one of his wild freaks he should throw my boy into the lake by way of teaching him to swim."

"Paul is quicksilver," said Mary, laughing.

"And what is Will Robins?" asked her brother.

"True as steel," was the maiden's reply.

A loud whoop and halloo from the woods made little Charley, who was playing with his sister in the doorway, start up with the joyful cry, "Here comes Paul!"

Bounding along the rough pathway came Eerie, a small-made, fair-faced young man, with long unkempt hair hanging down almost to his shoulders, and his garments, as usual, in disorder, for Paul constantly appeared as if he had had to dress in a hurry Eerie was in one of his lively moods; he had brought with him an odd-looking tambourine of his own manufacture. Paul was very fond of music, and could play on half-a-dozen instruments, though on none of them did he play well.

"What say you to this?" cried Paul Eerie, flourishing his tambourine aloft; "I made it myself out of a sheep skin and the hoop of an old barrel, and it wants nothing but the bells to make it as pretty an instrument as ever was touched by a Spanish gipsy!" and, to the great delight of Charley, Eerie gave the family a musical entertainment which, however much it might amuse them, did not quicken the progress made in stuffing the flock mattress.

Having danced and sung until he had exhausted his wild spirits, Paul Eerie sobered down for a while, and became like an utterly different man. Instead of being boisterous and gay, he appeared, for the hour, quite sensible and grave. The tambourine was hung up on the wall; Paul gave it to Mary Astwood, though it was a present about as useful to the maiden as a bagpipe or a box of cigars would have been.

Sitting down with the Astwoods, to help them on with their work, Paul Eerie was soon one of the

busiest members of the party. While his long slender fingers were engaged with the flock, he conversed pleasantly with his companions. No being could be more rational or more gentle in manner than was poor Paul at such times.

Seeing that the mirthful mood of his wild playmate was over, Charley returned to his game of ball with his little sister at the door.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Subject continued.

"We were just talking of you and your companion, Will Robins, when you made your appearance," said Katherine Astwood. "We were observing how strange it is that two men who are so very unlike each other should yet be such fast friends."

"It's lucky for Will that we are unlike," observed Paul, with a little jerk of the head to throw back from his face the long hair which, being limp and fine, was always falling over it when he stooped at his work. "If Will Robins had been like me, a pretty pair we should have made!" and Paul Eerie laughed a low strange laugh.

"When did your friendship begin?" asked Mary.

"It dates from our school-days," replied Paul. "Will and I always stuck close together—substance and shadow, the master called us. If any one bullied Paul Eerie, there was Robins always ready to stand up for the little chap that had not strength enough to fight his own battles. I was for ever getting into scrapes, and Will Robins helping me out of them. Once, I shall never forget it, I took a foolish freak to cork a pair of moustachios and whiskers on the likeness of our master's old grandmother, which hung up in the hall. Never was there such a storm in the school as when Atkins saw the old dame in the mob-cap made to look like a dragoon. Never was there such a flogging as that which he threatened to give to the impudent boy who had dared to play

such a trick. Will Robins had been seen writing his own name with a blackened cork, so suspicion fell upon him. Will knew well enough who had done the mischief—who was always first in any bit of mischief—and he could not clear himself without throwing the blame upon me. So he took the flogging without wincing, or uttering one 'Oh!' I believe that it pained me more than it pained him; for weeks I could hardly sleep at night for the swishing sound of the rod in my ears."

"What a generous friend!" murmured Mary.

"You may well say that," cried Paul Eerie. "And this trait of boyish heroism was only of a piece with Will's conduct ever since I knew him. He's a noble fellow, if ever there was one! Will Robins is true as steel."

Mary and her sister-in-law glanced at each other and smiled; Paul's expression in regard to his friend was exactly the same which had been used by the former not half-an-hour before.

"Saving me from a flogging is not the only debt that I owe Will, nor the greatest neither," said Eerie, again jerking the hair from his face, which had changed its animated expression for one more thoughtful and grave. "But for him I should have been rushing at a quick pace down the broad path which leads to destruction. I had started on it, there's no mistake about that, and a wild young madcap like me carries too much steam to be stopped by a touch when once set running downhill."

"You had got into bad company, I suppose," observed Astwood.

"I'd become a member of a club," replied Eerie, "a debating club we called it; it might have been named a drinking club, for we met every evening at a public-house, and drank as much as we talked.

Our chairman, he was an infidel, he would harangue for hours together on the rights of man, and the wrongs of man, till he confused all our notions of right and wrong, and made us believe that the world could not get on unless it were turned topsy-turvy. Everything that we had been taught to consider good, respectable, and holy was made the butt for the shafts of his wit; he spared neither church nor crown in his sallies. We thought Dan Jenkins the cleverest fellow in all the nation, fitter, though he was but a journeyman blacksmith, to govern the land than any of the statesmen now at the head of the State. Dan considered himself fit to govern Nature too, if we could judge by his manner of talking, though I think that he would have had trees grow with their roots in the air, and mountains stand on their peaks instead of their bases, if he could have had his own way."

"Did Robins ever attend these debating meetings?" enquired Mary, without raising her eyes from her work.

"Once, and once only," replied Paul Eerie. "I'd coaxed him to come, and get a few new bright sparks, as I said, struck out of his sober old brain. Dan Jenkins was in high feather that night, and gave us more of his wit, as I thought it then, nonsense, as I should call it now, than he usually did. I think that I can see the face of Will Robins as he sat, so grave and stern, with his lips pressed together, and his eyes fixed on the orator, who was swinging his arms about, and declaiming, and denouncing, after his fashion, statesmen and parsons, and indeed every man who wore a good coat on his back, as if they were so many ninepins for Dan to knock down with the ball of his wit. We laughed, and cheered, and hammered on the table till every pot and glass on it

jingled, to show that we agreed with everything said by our chairman, whether we understood it or not. Will Robins neither laughed nor cheered, neither would he drink as we drank. He is, as you know, not a man of words, so he said nothing, but one could see with half an eye what he was thinking, and when Dan Jenkins flew a bit higher than usual, we all turned to Will Robins to look how he would take what he heard. At last Dan Jenkins said something about the Bible; I don't recollect what it was; I had got so accustomed to his way of talking that what would once have shocked now amused me, and I drank in the poison of scepticism as carelessly and fearlessly as I tossed off a dram. But it was not so with Will Robins. He rose from his seat, not hastily, not like a man in a passion, but with that quiet resolute air which we know so well, turned his back on us all, and left at once the place where he had heard his Master's Name and Word dishonoured."

"Doubtless Robins remembered that it is written, *Blessed is he that walketh not in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful,*" observed Mrs Astwood.

"Will was not allowed to leave in peace," continued Paul Eerie. "He was pursued by a volley of scoffs, jests, and hissing, which few men but himself could have borne. The fellow who sat next to me was about to send after Will something harder than words. He raised his empty pewter pot for a fling; but I could not stand that sort of game, so I knocked it out of his hand, and got a black eye for my meddling, for that night closed, as too many others had closed, with brawling and fighting."

"Surely that was the last time that you ever joined such a worthless set!" exclaimed Mary.

"I wish that I could say that it was the last time," replied Eerie, frankly; "but there was a strange charm to me, I own, in those debating meetings. I was a bit of a favourite amongst my pals; they liked my songs and my jokes; and, if the truth must be owned, it pleased my vanity to show off amongst them, and to be called the best of good fellows. I knew that Will Robins disliked my attending the meetings; he spoke to me more than once about it; but Dan Jenkins had said so much about my not letting myself be led and humbugged, as he called it, by a fellow who had not half my wit and spirit, that I, like a coward, was afraid of being thought to be influenced by his opinion."

"I should have thought that Will Robins would have been one of the last persons in the world to have been accused of humbugging any one," remarked Arthur Astwood.

"Oh! Dan did not mind what he said either about persons or things," cried Eerie, with a shrug of the shoulders, and a jerk of the head; "he cared not for sense but for sound; like yon tambourine, he made plenty of noise, just because he, like it, was empty and hollow. I can't think, now that I've grown so sensible and sober, how I ever suffered myself to be led by so shallow a fellow; but Jenkins knew my weak points. I liked to be laughed with, and hated to be laughed at. A man with vanity in his heart is like an ox with a ring in his nose; just lay your finger on that, and you may guide him whither you will."

The Astwoods were amused at the frank simplicity of the young settler, who spoke out his quaint ideas, at his own expense, with such singular candour.

"But this state of affairs did not go on for many

weeks," continued Paul Eerie. "Will Robins brought the affair to a point in his own straightforward way. I was strolling along the road, one Sunday afternoon, to join our fellows at the 'Black Bull,' when I met Will Robins returning from church, with his prayer-book under his arm.

"'Where are you going?' said he.

"'I think you've a pretty good guess,' replied I; and I was going to pass my friend, but he laid a firm grasp on my arm.

"'Paul Eerie,' said he, 'I've something on my mind to say to you.'

"'Out with it, then, and be quick about it,' cried I, 'or I'll be late for our meeting at the "Black Bull."'

"'Don't go there,' said Will, earnestly; 'as you love your own soul, don't go there.' He had still hold of my arm.

"'You've no charge of my soul, you're not my keeper,' cried I, laughingly, trying to shake him off.

"'I am your *friend*.' said he, and there was something in Robins' way of saying that one word that expressed more than the longest speech could have done. It seemed to tell me that he cared too much for me to let me rush into danger unwarned; that he cared too much for me to let me fling away my hopes of heaven; that he would rather risk making me angry than look quietly on while I drank in that which he knew to be deadly poison to my soul."

Paul Eerie spoke with emotion, and there was a pause of some moments before he again went on.

"'Now,' thought I, in my folly and pride, 'I'll show off my independence. No one shall say again that Paul Eerie is led by Will Robins. I know that you are my friend, and I'm yours,' I replied,

but that gives you no right to tell me where I should go, or where I should not go. I don't meddle with your church-going; you shan't meddle with my merry meetings at the "Black Bull." You take your way, I take my way; we can think differently, and act differently, and yet keep fast friends for all that!"

"'No,' said Robins, slowly, looking me full in the face as he spoke; 'two cannot walk together except they be agreed.'" (Amos iii. 3.) "'I cannot hold that man as my friend who sits still and laughs when my Master's Word is blasphemed. Paul Eerie, you must *choose* between my friendship and that of Dan Jenkins and his jovial companions.'

"I was startled, I was taken aback. It had never occurred to my mind that anything ever would or could break the tie between me and the friend of my boyhood. I tried to laugh, but it was of no use; to speak, but the words stuck in my throat. I knew not what to reply. Pride and self-will were pulling me hard in one direction, and there was nothing but the cord of friendship keeping me back from being drawn into a whirlpool of guilt. I know not how the inward struggle would have ended, had not one of the members of our club come up at the moment.

"'Just come from church, Paul? ey?' cried he; 'going to turn a saint, and be taught psalm-singing by Robins?'

"'No fear of that, Pat,' laughed I, drawing my arm from the grasp of Robins. 'I'm just on my way to join our merry boys at the "Black Bull," so we'll go together.'

"I glanced at Will as I turned away. I shall never forget the look of his face. He was pale and sad—as he might have been had he stood by the open grave of an only brother, with too much sor-

row in his heart either for words or for tears. I shouted out, 'good bye!' but Robins returned no answer. I could not help thinking as I walked towards the 'Black Bull,' 'I've broken with the best friend that I have upon earth, and what shall I get in exchange?' but I drove the thought from my mind; I was determined then not to think."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Subject continued.

"I AM not sure whether Will Robins took the wisest course in regard to his friend," observed Mrs Astwood; "might it not have been better to have refrained from bringing matters to so decided a point, and rather to have kept up friendly intercourse, and have watched his opportunity of speaking a word in season? If we were all to break off at once with those who think differently from ourselves, or those whom we think to be erring, we should, at least it seems so to me, show something of the Pharisee's spirit, and deprive ourselves of the power of influencing others for good."

"I agree with you, my dear, that it would be so in many cases," said her husband; "but not as regards the one in question. Great evils require sharp remedies. If a house be somewhat out of repair, we may stuff up a crack here, or replace a tile there, at our leisure; but if the house be in a blaze, the quickest means of smothering the fire must be resorted to directly. Robins knew that the danger of his friend was that of actual perdition; that the only earthly motive that was of any avail in keeping him back from the 'whirlpool of guilt' was Paul Eerie's value for his friendship. The 'word in season' was likely to be little attended to; nay, had been spoken without effect. Robins is not an eloquent man, and has small power of persuasion. But Paul has owned that he was startled at the idea of losing his friend

altogether. Robins threw, as it were, his whole weight into the scale of duty, and but for the accidental coming up of Paul Eerie's worthless companion, he might have been drawn to do for the sake of friendship what he would not do for the sake of conscience—give up attendance at riotous meetings."

"Besides, surely Robins was acting according to the command—*Be not ye unequally yoked with unbelievers,*" suggested Mary, who had been listening with deep interest to the story. "If the cord of close friendship unites two who are bent on going on opposite paths, it is quite as likely that he who takes the wrong one will draw over his comrade to evil, as that his comrade will draw him over to good. Friendship itself may become a dangerous means of temptation."

"True, true," said Katherine Astwood, who was of a meek spirit, ever ready to own herself to have been mistaken in judgment; "our Lord spoke of our forsaking brethren, wife, or children, if need be, for His sake, and must have meant to include friends also, even one dear as a brother. But pray, Paul Eerie, go on with your story, and forgive me for having interrupted you in it."

"I carried an aching heart with me to the place of meeting," resumed the settler. "Robins and I had been so much together, and—unlike as we are—had suited each other so well, that to part with him, and in such a manner, was almost like wrenching off a limb. I did not choose, however, to show how keenly I felt, and I not only chatted gaily on the way, but I entered the parlour of the 'Black Bull' whistling a lively tune. I found several of the fellows of our club at the place before me, and the news with which they met me soon put a stop to my whistling.

"'Have you heard, Paul ——'

"'Do you know, Eerie, what has happened to poor Dan Jenkins?'

"'What's the matter with him?' cried I, glancing at his vacant seat at the head of the table.

"'Dropped down in a fit ——'

"'Dying ——'

"'Dead!' interrupted a third, who entered the parlour just after myself; 'I've come from the cottage of Jenkins; he never spoke a word after he dropped down on his own hearth.'

"It might have been supposed that so awful and sudden a death would have made a solemn impression on the minds of every one present. Here was a poor wretch, who had made one of our circle not twenty-four hours before, called to his terrible account, with no time for preparation, no time for prayer—called to face the God whose commandments he had broken, whose wrath he had defied, the Judge of the quick and the dead! But if any such impression were made, it did not appear to last for ten minutes. The comrades of poor Dan Jenkins soon began to talk of his death with as much careless indifference as they might have done of that of a horse that had dropped down in harness.

"'I wonder who'll take his place at the smithy?' observed one, as he lighted his pipe; 'there's not a many men as could give such a hard stroke at the anvil as Dan.'

"'Or such a hard stroke at corruptions in the State,' said another; 'he was a 'cute pol'tician, was Dan. 'He al'ays saw what was a comin' ——'

"'Save what was a coming to himself,' laughed a third; 'or he'd not have bought a new pair of boots last Friday.'

"'I s'pose there'll be a sale of his things; I wou-

der now what they'd take for them new boots?' said the postman, who was of a calculating mind.

"'It's ill standing in dead men's shoes,' cried the carter; which witty observation caused a laugh to run through the circle.

"'I take it Dan's widow won't break her heart; he was never much at home,' observed one of the party.

"'So much the better for her; a dog's life she led when he was at home,' said the carter.

"My first thought on hearing of the death of our late companion was that there would be no debating or drinking on that evening at least, and that our meeting would break up at once, but I soon found out my mistake. Though Dan Jenkins had had many followers, he had not made one true friend, and men were not disposed to give up their amusements because he no longer could share them. 'There are as good fish in the water as were ever taken out of it,' was the proverb quoted by the postman, and it satisfied his hearers that, though Dan might have been 'a jolly good fellow,' we could do very well without him. I was voted to the vacant chair which Dan had filled but the evening before, and soon the walls of the 'Black Bull' rang again with our jests and our laughter, as if every one had forgotten the fate of the wretched Jenkins.

"But though I led the mirth, I own it with shame, there was something in it which shocked and disgusted my soul. We broke up our meeting earlier than usual, and on this night at least I was perfectly sober. I walked homewards alone, in bright moonlight, for the sky was cloudless, and the harvest-moon at the full. I had to pass the dull dark cottage in which, I knew, lay the body of my late companion.

"'If I had been the one taken instead of Dan Jenkins,' thought I, '(no unlikely thing, for he was the stronger man of the two), would not my loss have been taken as lightly as his has been at the meeting? Would not these fellows, who call themselves friends, have been laughing and singing and tossing off their beer, while my corpse lay stiff on the bed—and my soul'—I did not care to dwell on what would have been the state of my soul, for all the infidel trash to which I had listened so often could not make me forget the solemn words, AFTER DEATH THE JUDGMENT. 'And it is for the cheering, and the clapping, and the praise of such companions as these that I have flung away, like a broken pipe, the friendship of the only man who would have stuck to me through thick and thin while I lived, and who would have truly mourned over my grave! Which of the rollicking band whom I have just left would take one flogging to save me from ten, or would give up one evening's mirth for my sake? What a mad exchange I have made! But the old proverb says, "It's never too late to mend." I'll not go to bed this night without letting Will know that I repent of my bargain.'

"So I turned off the road, and ran at top speed down the field that was between me and the cottage of Robins. You know that when I once take a fancy to do a thing, I go at it like a bullet out of a gun, and if Robins had lived twenty miles off, I'd have run to find him all the same. I came, all out of breath, to the cottage; how still and peaceful it looked in the moonlight, with the old willow beside it! I shouted out the name of my friend; he did not answer at first; I had probably roused him from sleep, for Will kept earlier hours than I did. I could not wait till he should rise and come down to

the door, impatient fellow as I always have been! A cherry-tree grew close to the cottage; I was up amongst the branches in a minute, and rapping at Will's window like mad. That was enough to make any one wide-awake, and Will must have guessed who was the only wild chap likely to rouse him up after that fashion. He threw up the sash of the window, and I, giving a spring like a cat, was first on the ledge, then into the room, before he knew what I was after.

"'You've come from the "Black Bull?"' said Robins; he looked annoyed; no doubt he thought that I had taken a drop too much.

"'Ay, for the *last* time!' cried I, breathless and panting; 'I've been weighing a score of flatterers against one true friend, and I find,' I continued, catching hold of Will's hand and wringing it hard, 'I find that the flatterers kick the beam, and that one pound of good true metal outweighs a heap of chaff!'"

Paul Eerie had told his tale with a good deal of animation and excitement, acting each scene as he described it, and he ended by scattering a quantity of the mattress stuffing on either side of himself, which gave both force to his words and some trouble to Mary, who had to pick it up after he had left.

"With you second thoughts were certainly best thoughts, Paul Eerie," said Katherine Astwood; "a true friend is one of the best gifts of heaven; the Bible description of friendship is, *A threefold cord*, which *is not quickly broken.*"

"I suppose that that verse means that if three friends keep together, they are pretty sure to hold their own against the rest of the world," said Paul Eerie.

"I scarcely think that that is its meaning, though it may be so," replied Mrs Astwood. "If we refer to the context we see that it is of the friendship between *two* that the inspired Preacher is speaking. *Two are better than one. . . . If they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.* It rather seems to me that the word *threefold* relates to the nature of that friendship which alone deserves the name. For that affection which is likely to last, that which is *not quickly broken*, three things are required, Forbearance, Fellowship in feeling, and Fellowship in faith."

"Ay, you do well to put Forbearance first," cried Paul Eerie; "he who would be my friend must have a good stock of that!" he laughed, but the laugh sounded a sad one.

"Forbearance is perhaps *always* required in long, abiding friendship," observed Mrs Astwood; "as we are all poor, erring creatures, we each in turn need that allowance should be made for infirmities, and forgiveness accorded for wrongs."

"And Fellowship in feeling, that is, sympathy, is another needful strand in the cord," cried Paul; "we cannot keep very close to one with whom we have no fellow-feeling, one who does not share our hopes and our fears, our earthly joys and our sorrows."

"And our heavenly hopes," added Arthur. "Fellowship in faith is the most important strand of the three, for it is that which makes friendship immortal. I should care comparatively little for a friendship which is but for this life, a friendship which death could end."

Mary had spoken but little, but now she modestly added her word. "Ruth said to Naomi, *Thy people shall be my people*, surely this showed fellow-

ship in feeling; but when she added, *and thy God my God*, this showed fellowship in faith."

"It was this beautiful threefold cord which united Jonathan to David," observed Mrs Astwood. "The prince loved the shepherd who was to take the place on a throne which Jonathan might have deemed his own by right of birth. He loved David through sorrow, he loved him in danger, he strengthened him in the Lord; and we may believe that through all eternity that sacred tie will endure, that threefold cord of holy friendship which was never broken upon earth."

CHAPTER XXX.

Subject continued.

As time went on, Paul Eerie more and more frequently appeared at the home of the Astwoods. Notwithstanding his playful wit, his kindness of heart, his readiness to amuse or to help, his visits became somewhat burdensome to the family at Forest Cot. It was difficult to set steadily to any work while Eerie was present, and he now and then did such strange things as to cause uneasiness in the minds of his friends. One day, for instance, Paul, in one of his frolicsome moods, perched little Charley high on the branch of a beech-tree, a position which delighted the child so long as Paul was gathering beech-nuts below. But when Paul had gone off in haste to help Mary Astwood to churn, and forgot all about little Charley, the position of the little prisoner in the tree became one of terror and danger. It was not until Katherine had become alarmed at the long absence of her boy, and after searching the house and all places near it, had come in tears to ask Mary to help her to find the lost child, that Paul remembered that he had left poor Charley in a tree nearly a quarter of a mile from the dwelling. Then, indeed, he darted off so eagerly to repair his neglect that he threw over the churn in his haste.

No one could count upon the movements of Paul, when he would come, when he would go, what he would say, or what he would do. The unfinished chair still stood on its three legs in a corner, a kind of

emblem of him who had made it, prettily carved, but utterly useless.

Will Robins always attended the meetings for prayer which were held upon Sundays, but did not very often appear at the Astwood's cottage during the week, though he was always a welcome guest, especially to one of the party. He said, and doubtless said truly, that he was too busy to go far from Wild Copse; but he did not add, as he might have done, that it was hard that he should have to do all the work there for his friend as well as for himself. Robins had some deeper reason for absenting himself from society in which he delighted. Whenever Will shared a meal at Forest Cot, or had a sociable talk with Mary, Paul became gloomy and sullen, and would hardly open his lips. Robins made no observation, but it was evident that he disliked Paul's being so much with the Astwoods, and would gladly, had he had the power, have kept his wild comrade at home. Paul was very jealous of any interference on the part of Will Robins, and burst into a furious passion when, on one occasion, his friend reminded him that the copse near their log-hut must be cleared, and that he had better, for a few days at least, absent himself from the cottage.

"I'm quite able to manage my own affairs without your meddling!" exclaimed Eerie, with flashing eyes; "I've something to attend to besides the hewing of wood, a thing which any thick-skulled blockhead can do!"

Robins made no reply to the taunt, for as a taunt it certainly sounded, and it made the cheek of Mary flush crimson with indignation. Will went quietly away to the hard labour which his comrade refused to share. Certainly the cord of Will's friendship lacked not the strand of forbearance.

"I wish with all my heart," observed Katherine Astwood to her husband when they were alone together, "that Paul would take to wood-chopping or anything else at Wild Copse, so that he would keep away and leave us in peace. What he has to do here, except to hinder others, I know not, unless," she added gravely, "he hopes to win our Mary to be his wife."

"He shall never do that!" cried Astwood. "I would as lief let my sister recross the Atlantic in a balloon, as give her in marriage to such a strange, hare-brained fellow as Eerie. Besides, I received to-day a letter from an acquaintance in England, to whom I had made casual mention of the settlers at Wild Copse, which makes me rather uneasy. I shall walk over to-morrow and have a conversation with Robins; it may be necessary for us to come to a clear understanding with Paul."

Astwood lay awake for half the night, turning over the matter in his mind. He rose early in the morning, and as soon as he had had family prayers, started for Wild Copse. When Arthur had gone about half the distance he met Paul Eerie, who was coming towards him with rapid, eager steps, sometimes quickened to a run. The young man did not return the greeting of Arthur Astwood, nay, though passing him within the distance of a few yards, did not appear even to see him. Arthur was certain, and the certainty gave him anything but satisfaction, that Paul Eerie was hastening towards Forest Cot. With quickened steps and an anxious mind Arthur pursued his way through the forest to Wild Copse.

A very wild and desolate spot was that in which the two emigrants had fixed their abode. Almost all the trees around were firs, though one large oak tree spread its long branches over the log-hut. This

hut was small and rude, and yet there had been an attempt made to ornament it, for in front of the door was an arched porch, supported by pillars of rough-hewn wood. But the pillars did not match each other in height, and the top of the porch was unfinished; Arthur could recognise at the first glance the handiwork of Paul Eerie.

The log-hut was silent and empty, but the sound of the axe amongst the pine trees at a little distance guided Arthur's steps to the spot where Will Robins was hard at work at the clearing, the hatchet in his hand, and the toil-drops beading his lip and brow.

Few words passed between the two men before Arthur came to the subject which burdened his mind, and explained to Will Robins the cause of so early a visit.

"Let us sit down on this fallen pine, I am anxious to have a few words with you, Robins," said Arthur. Will hung his axe on a bough, and sat down on the trunk of the forest tree which he had brought down by the strength of his arm.

"You are the friend of Paul Eerie," said Arthur, "but not even your friendship for him will prevent you, of this I am sure, from giving a manly and straightforward answer to the question which I am going to ask. You know that Paul is much at our cottage"—Will Robins knitted his brows; "his manner is strange, his words are wild, he does not act like a rational being. You have been with him from boyhood, and can tell me all that I want to know, that I ought—for the sake of my family—to know, for it is no idle curiosity that brings me here to-day. Is it true, or is it not, that the mother of Eerie died in a mad-house?"

Robins bit his lip; his sad silence was answer sufficient.

"And how could you, being aware of a fact such as this, and knowing how more than probable it is that this poor wild fellow is tainted with the malady of his parent, how could you bring him out with you to Canada to share your home?" cried Arthur.

"I thought that a complete change to new scenes, steady work, and separation from companions who had led him into habits bad for any one, but most especially bad for Eerie, would give him the best chance of keeping his brain right," replied Robins. "I knew that a dark cloud was hanging over him, poor fellow, and of course that was a reason for not leaving him behind."

"True as steel!" thought Arthur.

"I am glad that you have yourself broached the subject of Paul's state," continued Robins, speaking with evident effort. "I have often and often thought of putting you on your guard; and had I seen, had I suspected that Paul was too welcome at Forest Cot, I must in honour have done so. But now you know all, and will judge what is best. I hope that you will be able to do, what I have vainly attempted to do, persuade my poor friend to give up his frequent visits. I cannot, must not, come over myself; I need not explain the reason why." Will Robins rose abruptly from his seat, wrung Arthur's hand, and then hastily strode away to hide the painful emotion which he could no longer suppress.

"How noble a thing is self-sacrifice," thought Arthur Astwood, as he went on his homeward way; "here is a man in his prime, a man suited to enjoy domestic happiness, and who, if I am not greatly mistaken, has a very large share of that happiness at this moment within his reach, here he is shutting himself up from cheerful society with a comrade half, if not wholly, insane, in a hut which he can

never ask a wife to share so long as Paul is its inmate. This is friendship, indeed; this is a cord not quickly broken."

At a short distance from his own home Arthur was met by his wife, who ran to meet him with her countenance full of alarm, her little girl in her arms, and Charley close behind her.

"O! Arthur, I am so thankful to have you back!" gasped Katherine. "Paul is here; he is stranger than he was ever before; he has beaten Charley, my own poor boy! he has been so dreadfully excited! I implore you, once for all, to forbid him the house altogether."

Anxious, perplexed, and annoyed, Arthur hastened on to his dwelling, and as he entered it caught the sentence uttered by Mary in an agitated tone, "Pray, pray, Paul Eerie, never come here again."

"Yes, it is better that you should not now come here again," said Arthur, going into the room where his sister was with her unwished-for guest. Astwood felt that a decided stand must be made, and that the sooner that it was now made the better for all parties. He felt this the more strongly because the face of poor Eerie betrayed but too clearly that the "dark cloud" which had been hanging over him had broken in storm, and that strangeness had at last taken the form of decided insanity.

At the sound of Astwood's words, which were uttered in a tone of quiet decision, Paul turned suddenly round, glared upon him like a fierce wild beast that crouches in act to spring; then with the cry, "I know to whom I owe this, and I will make him repent it," the unhappy man darted out of the dwelling, and rushed to the forest with a speed which would have made pursuit utterly hopeless.

"Oh! Heaven guard Will Robins from his fury!" exclaimed Mary, bursting into tears.

This painful interview changed for the time all the peace and cheerfulness of Forest Cot into anxiety and distress. Katherine and Mary were full of vague fears, which Arthur could scarcely calm by reminding them that Robins was a far more powerful man than his companion, and had the advantage of possessing a clear brain, and that influence over poor Eerie which the strong mind usually exercises over the weak one.

The following day was Sunday; but to the service held at Forest Cot no one came from Wild Copse. The manly voice of Will Robins, the musical tones of Paul Eerie, who always took a second, were missed when the hymn was sung. Both the friends were remembered in fervent prayer. Mary looked wretchedly ill, and was so troubled by gloomy forebodings, that her brother, to relieve the anxiety which was preying on her health, went again in the afternoon to the hut on the farther side of the forest.

Arthur found Will Robins sitting under his porch, quietly reading his Bible. This was a great relief to Astwood, but his heart misgave him when, on Will's raising his head, severe bruise-marks appeared on his face.

"Where's Paul—how is he—what has he done?" were Arthur's eager questions, as he shook the hand of his friend.

"Asleep there," Robins glanced at the hut; "he was rather violent last night; he is better now, thank Heaven."

"His mind?"

"Shaken a little at present. He has had a great disappointment; he thinks that I have caused it,"

replied Robins, and for a moment he pressed his hand over his eyes. "But, please God, the mind will right itself again; we must try patience and prayer."

"You cannot keep him here; he must be watched day and night," observed Arthur.

"He shall be watched by me," answered Robins; "I have more power over poor Paul than any other person possesses; were we in England, indeed, other means of cure might be tried; but we are in a strange land, and no one cares for him here but ourselves."

"But to what a life you are condemning yourself!" exclaimed Arthur. "To dwell here, in this wild, desolate place, shut out from all society save that of one poor half-mad companion, to bear with his humours, perhaps his violence ——"

"He is my *friend*," interrupted Robins, as if that one word must settle the question. "Of course I cannot come to Forest Cot at present," he added; "she—you will know the cause of my absence. I cannot even ask you now to come to my hut; Paul might awake, and he must not see us together. Thanks for all your brotherly kindness—farewell!"

Arthur had known instances of self-denying friendship before, and had read of others, both in history and in fiction; but never had he so realised what is meant by *a friend that sticketh closer than a brother* as when he turned from the lonely log-hut, and left Will Robins at the dreary post to which he was bound by the cord of friendship.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Subject concluded.

A BRAVE man might hazard limb or life, a generous man might strip himself of half his fortune, for the sake of one whom he loved—and yet both such men fail to bear the weary trial, the heavy strain which, during the long winter, proved how enduring was the tie of Christian friendship. For months the Astwoods saw nothing either of Paul or Will Robins. Sometimes, but rarely, they heard of them, either from other settlers, or from the Red Indians who occasionally visited Forest Cot. The Astwoods gathered from the accounts which thus reached them at long intervals that the mind of Paul Eerie was in some measure recovering its balance, though he had frequent long fits of depression, and occasional outbursts of passion. Will Robins was nurse—guardian—brother—parent to his unhappy comrade. From the warping of poor Eerie's mind, he sometimes regarded his friend with dislike, and often treated him with open insult. The insult was never returned, the wrong was always forgiven. How little of such forbearance would Paul have met with from any of his comrades at the "Black Bull!" He had done one wise thing at least in his youth, and that was when he had weighed a score of flatterers against one real friend, and had chosen the true metal instead of the chaff.

Winter increased in severity just before the return of spring. On one bitter cold day, when water froze

in the room where a fire was kept up through the twenty-four hours, and milk, hardened to ice, had to be chipped with an axe, a Red Indian lad suddenly made his appearance at Forest Cot. He bore in his hand a piece of paper, evidently a fly-leaf torn from a book, on which something had been hastily written in pencil.

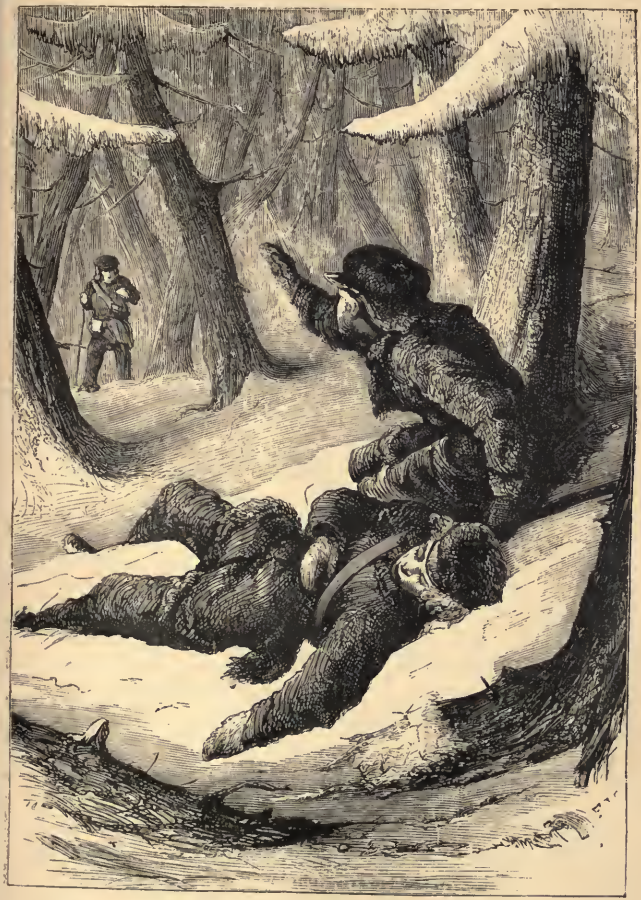
"It is the hand of Will Robins!" cried Mary. The contents of the leaf were eagerly read. Will's letters were short like his speeches. This contained but a few words.

"P. has disappeared. I go to track him. If he be not with you, help me to search. He could not outlive one night's exposure in such weather as this. W. R."

"I must be off at once," said Arthur

Mary flew for her brother's lined cloak and fur boots; Katherine hastened to bring from her stores a flask of brandy that might be needed to restore a half-frozen wanderer to life. Arthur took his strong staff and sallied forth to search; the anxious, trembling women remained behind to pray.

Arthur searched for hours, but in vain; he could discover no trace of Paul Eerie. The chill blast bore the sound of a wolf's distant howl, but not that of a human voice. The red sun was setting behind the pine-forest; there would soon be darkness over earth. Arthur knew that it would be as much as his life was worth to remain out much longer in the terrible cold, and turned towards the light which already gleamed from the window of his home to guide him back. Before Arthur could reach it, however, his steps were suddenly arrested. He thought that he heard a faint "halloo!" from the wood. He listened; yes, there it was again; he could not be mistaken, though the shout was uttered in feebler tones than before.



"'Will Robins—Paul Eerie—where are you? 'Here—*together!*' replied a faint voice from the wood."—p. 219.

Arthur raised his hand to his mouth, and loudly answered the "halloo!" The sound rang through the cold clear air, and reached the cottage, bringing hope to the anxious watchers within it. It reached other ears also in the direction towards which the settler was hastily pressing. Arthur again hallooed and called out, "Will Robins—Paul Eerie—where are you?"

"Here—*together!*" replied a faint voice from the wood.

Yes, there they were together, lying upon the snow, which was like to have been a winding-sheet to them both. Will Robins had for miles followed the track of his friend, and had found him at last in a half-frozen state on the ground. Vainly had Will attempted to rouse Paul, by giving him a cordial which he had brought with him from Wild Copse. The only chance of restoring animation to the wanderer was to take him to the shelter of some well-warmed dwelling. Such a place was not to be found within miles of the spot! The days were short, and night would close in early, and to be out through the night would be death, even to one of an iron frame. Will Robins knew this, but he hesitated not. He lifted the form of his friend on his back, and with this heavy burden proceeded towards Forest Cot, which was nearer to him than Wild Copse. Robin never talked over what he had endured while making an effort greatly beyond his strength, an effort which afterwards cost him a long, severe illness. He never told of the strained muscles, the staggering steps, the struggling on through the snow, with the icy north wind piercing him to the bones. While heavily laden, he still toiled on, till he sank exhausted at last under the burden of the friend whom he would rather die than forsake.

The insensible forms of the two companions were borne to Forest Cot. Hot water, warmed blankets, everything that could be required had been prepared there by Mrs Astwood and Mary. Will Robins was very soon brought to consciousness, and insisted on rising and going to his still senseless friend, and helping to chafe poor Eerie's half-frozen limbs. But to Paul aid had come too late! He only once opened his eyes, fixed them on Will with a look of recognition, murmured, "True as steel," and closed his eyes again, falling asleep, to waken no more in this world.

The long trial of friendship was ended; with Robins that friendship had been unbroken to the end. In due time Mary Astwood became the wife of him who had once given up his dearest hopes for the sake of his afflicted companion. Forest Cot became a bright and happy home, in which was heard the sound of merry voices, and at last the patter of little feet. The place was enlarged and improved by Will Robins; but he would never take down or alter the porch which had been made by poor Paul Eerie. Creepers were twined around it, and bright flowers hid the defects of his imperfect and unfinished work, just as tender memory cast a veil over all his faults in the mind of the noble-hearted man to whom he had been so closely bound by the

THREEFOLD CORD OF FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Reflections.

When I looked at my Katie, after I had finished my story, I saw that her eyes were brimming over with tears.

"Oh! do you think that poor Paul Eerie would go to heaven," she murmured, "though he was so fierce and passionate, and so ungrateful to his kind, brave friend?"

"We have no reason to fear otherwise," I replied. "Before his terrible malady broke out, Paul, with all his wayward fancies, was a simple, earnest believer. He had chosen the good part. I believe that the turning-point in Eerie's life was that night when he clambered in at Will Robins' window. From that time he steadily kept his resolve never again to join the debating meetings at the 'Black Bull.'"

"It was a great pity that Paul did not make his resolve earlier," observed Anne. "I've a notion that these nights of merry-making and hard drinking at the 'Black Bull' had a great deal to do with his subsequent madness, and that if Paul had gone on in his wild wicked course, insanity would have shown itself sooner. Intoxication leads in hundreds, I may say thousands of cases to madness; the pot-house is very often the door to the lunatic asylum. The man who, to gratify a wretched thirst for strong drink and excitement, gives up his senses every night, though it be but for a few hours, is likely enough to lose them altogether at last."

"I do so like your telling us about father's fine old uncle, Robins," said Katie, "for I love him, and I love his grand-children too, and I am so glad that they are to visit Beech Farm in the summer. I wish, grandad," she added, "that you would write out next the story of your shipwreck, and the brave doings of Uncle Robins. Of course I have heard very often about it, but I want to have the whole story put down on paper from the beginning to the end."

"I am afraid, Katie, that I must soon leave off trying to write out stories," I replied. "After each one I feel more unfit for any effort of hand or of brain. I must give up my pen to some younger writer."

"Not yet, grandad, not yet!" pleaded Katie. "Let us have one—only one story more, and let that one be of the shipwreck!"

"How that tale would recall old days, father," observed Charley, "as your last story has done. The very first thing that I can remember is being stuck up on the branch of the tree by Paul Eerie. I recollect him also, poor fellow, with his long hair dropping over his forehead, his wild mirth, and his songs. I was half fond of him, and half afraid of him. Even before he beat me, I had never the same confidence in Paul Eerie as I had in his friend."

"There is no leaning on quicksilver," observed Anne; "give me the true, tried steel!"

"The feeling of full trust seems to me to be the very core of friendship," observed Charley. "A friend is something very different from a mere pleasant companion. We want some one to stand by us in trouble, to help us out of difficulties, to be ready not only to *do*, but to *suffer*, if needs be, for our sakes."

"In such a friend," I observed, "we see a type,

poor and imperfect indeed, but still a type, of Him who is a brother born for adversity, of Him whose love is stronger than death. How long has our Heavenly Friend borne with our weakness, our waywardness, our ingratitude, and mistrust! He has, indeed, gone forth to track the wandering, to bring back the lost; and He has purchased redemption for those whom He deigns to call His *friends*, at the price of sufferings more intense than our minds have power to conceive."

We had entered on a very solemn topic, and a reverential stillness pervaded our little circle. Each, for awhile, was engaged with his own thoughts, and I trust that these thoughts were such as lift the heart towards heaven. Then my daughter-in-law looked at the clock; it was time for us to sing the evening hymn, which we always have on Sunday evenings before my Birdie goes to her roost. Katie is allowed to choose the hymn, and she selected on this occasion that well-known one which speaks of our Lord in the endearing character of our Friend.

One there is above all others
Best deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end;
They who once His kindness prove
Find it everlasting love.

Which of all our friends to save us
Could, or would, have shed his blood?
But our Saviour died to have us
Reconciled in Him to God.
This was boundless love indeed,—
Jesus is a friend in need.

Oh! for grace, our hearts to soften
Teach us, Lord, at length to love;
We forget, alas! too often,
What a Friend we have above.
But when home our souls are brought,
We shall love Thee as we ought.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Cord of Life.

THE beams of the setting sun glanced on the wide expanse of waters through breaks in the mass of heavy clouds that were piled up in the west. The air was so still that the line of smoke from the homeward-bound steamer hung straight over the white wake which she left behind on the sea. There was little motion felt in the vessel save the trembling caused by the working of the engine below. There was not enough of breeze to swell a sail, and but for steam the "Petrel" would have made no progress at all.

And it was a time when rapid progress was most impatiently desired by the passengers on board the steamer. The vessel was small, inconvenient, and, as was more than suspected, in rather a crazy condition. She was at any rate not in good working order, and the voyage from Canada had been very tedious. The engine had been sparingly supplied with fuel, and the passengers with food. The crew of the "Petrel" were an ill-chosen gang of various nations, and mostly not good specimens of any. There had been something like a mutiny on board, the sailors complaining of their rations, and not without cause; the very severe flogging which the ringleader had received had not increased the content, if it had silenced the murmurs of the crew.

The captain, Gawler by name, was a man of violent temper, a terror to those around him, though

he occasionally appeared lively and good-humoured, especially to the female passengers, with whom he liked to converse. Captain Gawler had a smattering of science, which he was fond of displaying; and he would sometimes talk for an hour at a time when he could find an attentive hearer. The subject of religion the captain usually avoided. He owned, and that not as if it were cause for shame, that for the last thirty years he had not opened a Bible. One of the passengers at the beginning of the voyage had applied to Gawler for leave to have regular prayers on deck or in the saloon, offering to conduct the service himself should the captain desire it, as there was no clergyman on board.

"If I thought that psalm-singing would help to fill yon sail, I'd do the business myself," was the reply of the captain; "but rant and cant are not in my line, and I want no self-made parsons on board, no Jonases to bring us ill-luck. If you must pray, Mr Astwood, you can do so to your heart's content in your cabin; nobody meddles with you there; but I'll keep my deck clear of your Methodistical haranguing;" and Gawler had swaggered off, with his thumbs in the pockets of his jacket, to abuse and swear at one of the crew who was doing something to the rigging in what the captain deemed a slovenly way.

So to the cabins praise and prayer had been confined during that wearisome voyage. The passengers consisted but of the two families of the Astwoods and the Robins, the former with two children of eight and six years of age, the latter with one little girl. But for the pleasant intercourse between these families, the voyage would have been one of unmixed discomfort and annoyance.

An attempt made by one of the passengers to dis-

tribute a few tracts amongst the crew of the "Petrel" had met with still greater discouragement than the offer to conduct divine service.

"Give those papers to the gulls!" had been the exclamation of Gawler, as he snatched the tracts from the passenger's hand, and flung them over the bulwarks into the sea; "*they* are the only gulls that you'll find hereabouts to swallow your trash!"

With so little to make the voyage pleasant, it was natural that the passengers should be somewhat impatient to get to the end of it. On the evening on which my story opens all were collected on deck, and every one's eyes were eagerly turned in the direction of the east, in hopes of being able to trace the dim outline of cliffs on the coast of Cornwall, as Gawler expected the vessel to reach port very early in the morning. There was nothing, however, to be seen yet but the wide blue sea; there was not so much as a sail to break the line of the horizon.

Little Charley Astwood stood leaning against the bulwarks, looking earnestly towards the point where the captain had told him that land would first be seen.

"I wish that it would come on to blow—to blow hard!" cried Charley; "I should like to be sent on faster than those white sea-birds can fly!"

"You're like enough to have your wish, my fine fellow," observed Gawler, strolling up, telescope in hand, to the group of passengers. "We'll have more than a cat's-paw soon; the clouds look black in the west; we may reckon on dirty weather to-night."

"I should not mind a gale," cried the boy; "it would land us sooner in port."

"And why are you in such haste to be in port, my man?" asked the captain.

"I'm tired of salt junk and mouldy biscuits, and

should like to drink milk fresh from the cow, and to scamper over green fields," was Charley's reply, which, as Gawler chanced to be in good humour, only made him laugh at the boy.

"You'll have a precious lot to see, specially in London," Gawler observed. "Your father there, with his antiquated notions, will find that the Old World hasn't been standing still while he was digging up potatoes in the New. Ten years makes a mighty deal of difference in these go-ahead times, and the old slow barges are left miles astern now that everything works by steam." Then the captain, who was in one of his talkative moods, launched out into what was with him a very favourite topic, the wonderful progress in knowledge, civilisation, everything that had lately been made by the human race. Gawler talked of steam, and gas, and machines of every kind, made to perform all manner of work; he spoke in a loud boastful tone of the triumphs of art and science, of man s making air, water, and fire his slaves, forcing the elements to do his bidding, and minister to his pleasure. Man, according to Captain Gawler, was a being too clever and too enlightened to be dependent even on his Maker; there was no limit to what reason and energy could accomplish over the powers of nature.

For some time Captain Gawler had all the talk to himself; Robins was taking his usual quarter-deck walk with his child in his arms; and Astwood was leaning against the mast, watching the last glimmer on the waters, as the sun sank behind the thick bank of clouds. Mrs Astwood was busy with her needle, with her little Lucy at her feet. Mary Robins, seated beside her sister-in-law on one of the low benches on deck, was dividing and arranging some seeds which she had brought from her Canadian garden,

in order to plant them in English soil. So the captain, who always talked loudly, as if his hearers were deaf, and proudly, as if laying down the law, for some twenty minutes went on with his harangue on the wonderful superiority of the present age to all the ages before it, and asserted that there was nothing which man would not accomplish at last by the force of his reason, and the power of his skill.

"There is one thing which he never has done, and never can do," observed Mary quietly, without raising her eyes.

Mary Robins was the only individual amongst his passengers to whom Captain Gawler was always civil, and to whose opinion he would listen, at any rate when he himself was tired of talking. Perhaps this was because Mary had read a good deal, and reflected over what she had read; or it might have been because of a certain strength of character which she possessed, under an exterior which was peculiarly gentle and prepossessing. Gawler was seldom, if ever, heard to use coarse language when Mary was near; her silent glance was a more effectual check on the captain than a reproof from any one else would have been.

"And, pray, Mrs Robins," asked Gawler, "what is this wonderful thing which man never has done, and never can do?"

"Make a seed," replied Mary, looking at a very small one which she was holding between her finger and thumb.

"A seed," echoed Captain Gawler, with a supercilious smile; "I think no great shakes of an atom like that! One could buy a bushel of 'em for a dollar."

"You might buy thousands of them, but not *make* a single one," replied Mary Robins. "No, if

all the most famous men of science in Europe were to be gathered together, and all the kings in the world to help them,—were the safety of their heads to depend on their success, the learned with their wisdom, and the mighty with their power, could not make one tiny living seed!"

"Perhaps not exactly that," observed Gawler, who could not deny the truth of what Mary had said "but they could do much greater things than that. What say you to building the Great Pyramid, a mountain of brick that has stood for thousands of years?"

"There is nothing very surprising about the Great Pyramid except its size," replied Mary, with quiet composure; "and even that is as nothing compared to that of many of the works of the great Creator. Beside one of His mighty mountains the Great Pyramid would seem to shrink to the size of a toy. And yet," she continued, "these huge mountains bear so small a proportion to the size of the world that they are but as grains of dust upon a large ball, scarcely enough even to roughen its surface."

"While the world itself," joined in Astwood, who had been listening to the conversation between his sister and the captain, "is, as we all know, but as a small speck compared with all the immense bodies whirling through space, the stars, or rather the suns, which stud the sky."

Mary laid her hand on an acorn, which she had brought from the oak which had overshadowed her Canadian log-hut, and which she intended to plant wherever she might settle in England, as a memorial of the place where her first happy married days had been spent.

"One single acorn such as this," she observed, "planted in the earth at the time when the Pyramid

was built, might have grown into a tree which would have borne thousands and thousands of acorns, each one the germ of another monarch of the wood. The Pyramid, man's work, has stood almost unchanged for many ages; but the one little acorn, which my baby could grasp, would have sufficed to cover by this time vast countries with forests, and have supplied wood enough for all the navies that float on the seas. Which, then, is the greater wonder, the Pyramid or the acorn?"

Gawler shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

Mary was usually quiet and reserved, but there were occasions when her words flowed with ease, and her mind was so full of its subject that she could hardly refrain from giving them utterance. Such was the case on the last evening that she spent on board the "Petrel," and in the presence of a man who rarely endured to hear any one so much as touch on the topic of religion.

"And there is another great difference which we may mark," Mary went on, "between the Pyramid and the oak. The one was probably built by poor bondsmen, laying on brick after brick, fainting under toil, smarting beneath the lash; such were the workers employed by man. But when the majestic oak-tree rose, with its gnarled roots and its knotted stem, and its multitude of leaves and acorns, God's workers were the gentle breeze, the soft dew, the nurturing earth below, the bright sunshine above. The Creator's workers felt no weariness, and His work had no blemish. So, again, captain, I would ask, which is the greater wonder, the Pyramid or the acorn?"

Gawler was still in good-humour, but was evidently unwilling to own himself beaten by a woman. "I give up the Great Pyramid," he said; "after all

there is, as you remark, nothing very surprising about it but its size, and not even a king of Egypt could be expected to pile up bricks as high as the Andes. But man has shown powers of invention, knowledge, and skill, that prove that there is nothing above the capacity of his intellect. The watch in my fob, the glass in my hand, are marvels of human ingenuity. I look on them as more wonderful still than your acorn. Yes, there may be limits to what man can do with his hands, but there are none to the powers of his mind." And Captain Gawler shut up his telescope with the air of one who has ended a discussion by an argument which none could possibly answer. But his gentle opponent was not yet convinced or silenced.

"Most wonderful, indeed, is the mind, God's gift," replied Mary Robins; "but there are limits to its powers, limits which the most talented of human beings have never been able to pass. You may explain, sir, the working of a watch, or the mechanism of a telescope; but who can explain the mystery of his own life—*the silver cord*, as it is called in the Bible? There is no one on earth who understands how the soul is joined to the body."

The boastful captain did not care to argue longer, for he saw that he could not hold his ground, so he tried to end the matter with a jest. "Man may not just be able to unravel that same silver cord," he laughingly observed, "nor to make it, but he can *break* it easily enough, and destroy life, if he cannot understand it."

"No," replied Mary, more earnestly, "he cannot even do that; *the silver cord* may be *unloosed*, but it cannot be broken; its end is in God's hands, not in man's."

"Why, you don't mean to say," cried Gawler,

mockingly, "that if I were to pitch you over from the mast-arm into the sea, I should not make an end of your life pretty quickly?"

Mary Robins shook her head. "You might change my state of existence, but you could not possibly destroy life itself in an immortal being," she replied, with some emotion. "Not in vain hath the Saviour said, *He that believeth in Me shall never die.* The silver cord is loosened upon earth, only to be drawn up unbroken to Heaven." And having gathered her seeds together, Mary rose from the bench, took her child from her husband, walked to the hatchway, and went down into her cabin. She did not care to continue the conversation longer, and yet was thankful then, and much more thankful afterwards, that she had been strengthened and helped to speak one word of Scripture truth to the scoffer whom, after the morrow, she was never likely to meet again upon earth.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Subject continued.

SEA and air had been still when the sun had sunk on that evening behind a thick bank of clouds, but the stillness was but the prelude to the storm. Captain Gawler had judged rightly about the weather, however mistaken he might be in other matters.

As the passengers knelt at their evening prayers in Astwood's cabin, the low muttering of thunder could be heard mingling with the sound of their voices. Then came the rushing noise of the gale. The vessel began to heave and pitch, so that the passengers had to catch hold of any fixture within reach to prevent themselves from being dashed from one side of the cabin to the other.

Prayers were just over when the steward came to see if all the port-holes were shut, a necessary precaution in such stormy weather, though it made the air of the small cabins almost intolerably close, from the mingled odours of oil, steam, and bilge-water which pervaded the vessel.

Charley thrust out his curly head from the upper berth in which he was perched. It must have been the idea of soon landing in England which made the boy restless, for the noise of wind and waves had never roused him from sleep.

"Isn't it blowing furious!" he cried, grasping tightly the edge of his berth, to keep himself from tumbling out of it. "How the ship rocks up and down, and how the ropes above do creak, and what

a noise the sailors are making, running along the decks over our heads!"

"I suppose that they are hoisting a sail to catch the breeze," observed Robins.

"It's something more than a breeze to-night," observed Astwood; "we're to have a good tossing at the close of our voyage." The vessel gave a violent lurch as he spoke, which almost threw Charley out of his berth, and brought an expression of alarm to the gentle face of Mary Robins.

"Are you frightened, Mary?" asked her husband.

"I should not be in the least so," she replied, pressing closer to her heart the child that was sleeping in her arms, "were I quite sure that the vessel is seaworthy, and the captain trustworthy," she added, in a lower tone of voice.

"Remember your own words to Gawler," said Katherine Astwood. "We can all say to our Heavenly Pilot, *My times are in Thy hand.* In that hand we are safe, however the tempest may rage."

"I know it—I feel it, dear sister," replied Mary, and very sweet and trustful looked her face in the light of the swinging lamp which hung from one of the beams of the cabin. "But still I own that I find it easier to talk about faith when the sea is calm and the air still, than to show it in a storm like this!" Mary had to pause for some seconds, as the noise of the blast and a crash of thunder would have drowned her voice had she attempted to speak on. "But I could not help thinking just now," she continued, when the noise for a space had lulled, "what a very sad thing it would be to be shipwrecked in sight of land, with father and home so near!"

"Come, come, Mary," said Robins, cheerfully, 'it

is high time that we should be off to our cabin. Cast your cares on Him who careth for us, and you may sleep in peace, let the winds blow never so wildly; Good night," said he, nodding to the Astwoods; "may we have a happy landing on the morrow."

Gently the strong man helped his weaker partner in the passage from one cabin to another, which the violent heaving and rolling of the crazy vessel made difficult for a woman with a child in her arms.

"I shall try to snatch a little sleep," said Katherine Astwood; "but I shall not take off my dress, as we may possibly have to land in the night, the wind driving us on so fast towards the shore. Oh! Arthur, will it not be joy to be in peace and safety at home after a storm like this?"

Arthur Astwood himself did not attempt to sleep. He had various things to do in preparation for an early landing; amongst others, he had some notes to write to friends on shore. But he soon gave up the endeavour to do anything, for the motion of the vessel made his hand unsteady, and strewed his papers over the cabin. Arthur Astwood sat and thought, while his dear ones slumbered around him. The words of his wife and sister had given the key-note to his reflections.

"Oh! to be in peace and safety at home after a storm like this! such is the longing desire of the Christian, as life's long voyage draws near to its close: at rest in the land of joy, safe in the Father's home! But it is possible, alas! to be buoyed up by such hopes, and yet to be shipwrecked, as it were, in sight of land. How closely we need to examine whether the vessel of our hopes be *seaworthy*, and the captain *trustworthy*, lest we deceive our own souls, and so never reach the shores of the Blessed! If the vessel of our hopes be formed of our own

merits—if we rest on our own good deeds, and expect to reach heaven because we have *deserved* the favour of the Most High, then, indeed, Presumption is the Captain, every plank of our ship is rotten, and certain shipwreck must follow. But if every hope be a hope in Christ, on His love to save, His blood to redeem, His grace to guide; if living, active Faith be at the helm, then, indeed, may we say with the Psalmist, *We will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea!* Oh! that I, and all dear to me, may fully, simply rest on that sure hope which is between poor sinners and the sea of perdition; that we may mix with it no false hope of self-righteousness, like worthless timber, through which the waves will force their way at the last! May not only the words of our lips, but the deep conviction of our hearts be this. 'In the Lord, and in the Lord *only*, have I righteousness and strength!' *Without* Christ I can do nothing, I am nothing but a poor sinner, unworthy so much as to lift up mine eyes towards heaven; *with* Christ I am a heaven-bound child of God, and His honour is pledged that not a hair of my head shall perish!"

Such were the reflections of Astwood as he sat in his cabin on that night of darkness and storm. The rushing sound of the gale, and the dash of the waves, with the rolling peals of thunder, gave deeper force to the words of a verse which so haunted his mind at that time, that it was ever after connected with memory of the most eventful and awful night which he ever passed during the course of his life.

"In peace let me resign my breath,
And Thy salvation see;
My sins deserve eternal death,
BUT JESUS DIED FOR ME!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

Subject continued.

ASTWOOD was roused from his meditations by a great and sudden shock, which almost threw him on his face. The motion of the vessel was arrested, her forward plunging was exchanged for a violent trembling, as if she were a living creature shuddering at the approach of destruction. Arthur had scarcely time to ask himself what could have happened, when he heard the loud voice of the second officer, as he darted up towards the deck with the startling cry, "The water is rushing through the starboard bunker! The ship's filling fast!"—a cry instantly followed by the loudly shouted-out command from above, "Call all hands on deck!"

Suddenly wakened as she was from deep sleep by such sounds of alarm, the presence of mind of Katherine Astwood did not forsake her. She sprang from her couch, and instantly began wrapping up her little Lucy in whatever she could first lay her hands on, while she called to her husband to help Charley to clamber down from his berth. At the same moment Robins shouted out from the cabin adjoining, "Astwood, rouse up your wife; the ship has struck—to the deck—quick—quick—to the deck!"

Very few minutes passed in preparations for flight. There was no time to care for property, or think about goods. The Astwoods bore their best earthly treasures with them in the children who, wrapped

in blankets, but bare-headed and bare-footed, soon quitted the cabin with them. Lucy was on Arthur's shoulder, Charley held his mother's hand. Arthur had some difficulty in forcing open the cabin door, and when he had done so, a torrent of sea-water came down the hatchway, deluging everything below.

"Up—up before the next wave comes!" cried Arthur, who feared that the steamer was going to pieces, and scarcely expected that he and his family would ever reach the deck.

As he was helping his wife up the companion-ladder, her boy being in front, another huge billow broke over the stranded vessel, and rushing down the hatchway, swept Charley off his feet, and threw him on his mother, who was following behind. Mrs Astwood fell, and, as was afterwards found, severely sprained her ankle; but in that moment of terror she was scarcely sensible of pain. The shrieks of little Lucy, as the terrified child clung dripping and shivering to her father's neck, increased the horrors of the scene, and she so impeded his movements that he was scarcely able to do anything to help his wife and his boy. Added to this, there was midnight darkness, for the wave had smashed the lamp which had been swinging below, and the forms of those who were trying to scramble up the ladder obscured even such gleams as the lightning threw from above.

Arthur would have found great difficulty in getting his family on deck, but for the aid of Will Robins, who had already placed there his own wife and child, and who now returned to give to his fellow-passengers what assistance he could. Robins first caught up Charley in his strong arms and lifted him on to the deck, and then stretched out a helping hand to poor Katherine, who, lamed by her fall, and half-blinded and suffocated by the deluge of water,

was scarcely able to struggle up the steep steps. At last, with his terrified, shrieking little girl, Arthur succeeded in gaining the sea-washed deck; and the sight which then presented itself to his eyes was one which the lapse of ages could not have effaced from memory.

The stranded vessel had partly heeled over, so that the deck was on a steep incline. At the lower part of this incline appeared—when sudden flashes made everything distinctly visible—the group of women and children. They were closely huddled together, clinging to the broken bulwark, their faces looking ghastly pale in the quivering light, as they watched each giant wave, with its gleaming crest of white foam, swooping down on the ill-fated vessel which, fast stuck on a sunken rock, lay exposed to its fury. There was no cry heard save from poor little Lucy, whom Astwood now placed in the arms of her mother. The child's shrieks were suddenly silenced from surprise, as a rocket with whizzing sound shot up into air, and then fell in a shower of sparks. It was a signal of distress from the wreck, but the hopes of relief from the shore had scarcely more substance than the sparks from the rocket. The coast of our island was not at that period studded with the numerous life-boat stations which are now one of the glories of Britain.

It was clear that Gawler had given up all idea of saving the stranded vessel, for the crew were actively engaged in letting down the boat, the *only* boat which that ill-furnished steamer possessed. The heart of Astwood misgave him; he knew too well how impossible it was that the boat should accommodate all who had embarked in the vessel, and how great was the probability of the wreck's breaking up before the boat could return for a second freight.

The shore was indeed not far off—white cliffs were looming through the gloom at the apparent distance of but three or four hundred yards; but the space of waters between was creamy with foam,—the passage of a boat through the breakers at night must be a matter of danger and difficulty, even were the gale less severe. It seemed as if only the wings of a bird could bear the ship-wrecked mariners safely across to those cliffs at whose feet the billows were breaking!

With the intense anxiety of a husband and father who sees his family in extreme peril, Arthur made his way along the deck to the place where Gawler was directing the labours of his men; even at that awful moment, with the storm bursting over his head, and the planks splitting asunder beneath his feet, the oath and the curse mingled with the captain's words of command!

"The women and the children must surely go first!" cried Arthur, with difficulty making his voice heard amidst the roar of wind and waves, and loudly shouted-out orders. He might as soon have pleaded with those winds and waves as with the panic-struck men on that sea-washed deck! No sooner was the boat rocking on the waves than there was a rush made to the side of the vessel; all discipline was destroyed; there was nothing but a wild struggle for life, every man eager to be first, each willing to thrust his messmate overboard into the raging sea, rather than miss his own chance of getting into the boat. There have been glorious instances of English tars, as in the "Birkenhead," caring first for the feeble and weak; examples of brave men helping women into the boat, and then remaining, like heroes, to die; but there was no such spirit of noble self-devotion amongst the crew

of the "Petrel." Gawler, instead of taking the captain's post of honour, that of being the last to quit the wreck, was one of the first to spring into the boat, and it was scarcely to be expected that the sailors would refrain from following the example set by their leader. The boat was full, as full as she could float; the men in her made desperate efforts to push off, as every minute added to their peril.

"Cut the rope—let go the rope—push off—we've no more room!" shouted the voices from below, but they were either unheard or unheeded by the desperate men above. "It will hold *one* more, and I will be that one!" seemed to be the thought of each of the three sailors who were still left on the deck. Over they sprang—down into the boat, then down—down into the deep! It was a fearful sight to witness! Arthur, leaning over the bulwark, saw one moment the crowded boat, the gleaming oars, the upturned faces, the next moment—over the spot where that boat had been swept one broad mighty wave, drowning the wild cry which arose from the poor wretches perishing below!

The strong had been lost; what chance was there then that the weak could be saved? It was with something akin to despair that Arthur Astwood returned to that part of the deck where Robins had remained with the women and children. The only source of comfort which then presented itself to his mind came from the thought, "at least we shall not be divided in death!" But the tones of earnest prayer which met his ear raised his soul to a higher source of consolation. He heard the voice of Mary utter the words, "Our times are in Thy hand, and however it may fare with us now, O Lord, living or dying, we are *safe!*"

"Arthur, surely there are lights gleaming on shore!" exclaimed Katherine; "the signal of distress has been seen!"

"I doubt that our countrymen will be able to afford us any help," replied Astwood. "That vivid flash showed us every line in yon cliffs, but not a boat lying below them. Even were there a boat, it is unlikely that the men on shore would venture to put off, the wind and tide would now be so dead against them."

No one spoke again for several minutes; even the children were awed into deep silence. It is an awful thing to feel so near eternity as the shipwrecked castaways did in the midst of that storm.

Suddenly Will Robins spoke. He had left the rest of the party on Astwood's rejoining it, no one knew with what purpose.

"I have found it," he said.

"Found what?" asked several voices.

"A large coil of cord," was the answer. "If I could carry one end of it to yon shore, you could draw back by it a rope which might, with the Lord's blessing, prove a means of deliverance to all."

Exclamations of hope burst from the lips of some of the party; but Mary cried in agitated tones, "Will, you could never swim to the land—look at these fearful breakers—you would go but to perish!"

"If I stay, all die——"

"But let us die together!" gasped Mary, clinging to her husband, as again a foaming billow broke over the side of the stranded steamer, carrying off with it part of the rigging.

"Mary, we must leave no means untried; the Lord can give me strength," said Robins, rapidly

casting off the garments that would impede him in swimming. "Arthur, help me to fasten this cord around me, not a moment is to be lost; the All-merciful grant that the wreck may hold together for awhile! Bless you, Mary—bless you, my child—we shall meet, if not on earth——" the rest of the sentence was lost; Will Robins had plunged head-foremost into the dark rolling sea, which had so lately engulphed his companions.

It is impossible to express in language the intensity of anxiety, the agonising suspense, which followed, as those on deck vainly strained their eyes to watch the course of the daring swimmer. They could not see him, they could only conclude that he was still battling with the waves and not sinking beneath them, by the nearly horizontal rolling-out of the line which Astwood held in his hands. Even the splitting asunder of the deck-planks, the increasing incline of the vessel, which brought the dark top of the funnel almost directly above the heads of the shivering group by the bulwarks, scarcely drew attention from the central point of interest, that point on the stormy waters where it was thought that Robins might be. Oh! that was indeed a time for prayer; not prayer that can be uttered in words, but the wrestling, agonising, pleading of the heart for mercy! Would that sinners could implore for the life of the soul with the fervour with which they intreat for that of the body on such fearful occasions as this!

How long this agony lasted no one on board could have told. Hours passed, if time could be measured by the amount of anguish crowded into the space which elapsed before a faint cheer from the shore was heard in an interval between the angry gusts of the gale. With a wild cry of hope that shout was echoed back from the wreck.

"He is safe! Oh, Heaven be praised! he has reached the land!" exclaimed Mary, apparently forgetful of her own danger in her delight at her husband's safety.

The coil was all unrolled. Arthur, grasping the coil with his wet, cold fingers, listened intently for the call to draw it in which should announce that to the other end had been affixed a rope which might form a line of communication between the wreck and the shore.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Subject continued.

And while Arthur watched and waited, the faint grey twilight dawned on the heaving waves, and gradually surrounding objects were seen less and less indistinctly as the faint light brightened into day. The wind was lulling, the thunder was stilled, the vivid lightning had ceased to flash; but the billows still rolled heavily on to the shore, breaking in foam over numerous sunken rocks which lay between it and the wreck—rocks which would have rendered it all but impossible for a boat without a pilot to have effected a safe landing during the night. It appeared to be next thing to a miracle that Robins, swimming in the darkness, should have escaped being dashed to pieces against one of these dangerous rocks.

The bold outlines of the cliffs of Cornwall were now plainly seen against the brightening eastern sky; living objects were moving upon them; and at their feet, though not at first visible because of the shadow, appeared a group of men who had clambered down by rough, steep paths, and who stood ready to give such help as they might to the shipwrecked party. There was nothing on this part of the Cornish coast which deserved the name of a beach; there was merely a strip of shingle, which the tide at high water almost, if not entirely, covered. No port was in sight; the unhappy Gawler must have missed his reckoning, and so have suffered his vessel to be driven on rocks against which his chart

would have warned him. Even thus it is that so many, by neglecting the Bible-chart, make shipwreck of their souls.

The increasing light made more visible to Astwood the peril of his own position and that of his helpless companions. Part of the deck of the "Petrel" was actually under water, and loose fragments of timber, which had been torn from the vessel by the waves, were floating and whirling amongst the breakers. Worn and pallid with fear looked the women as they sat, or rather crouched, on a part of the deck scarcely raised above the level of the sea, and washed by every successive wave. Their long hair hung in wet strands over their shoulders, while the frightened, half-drowned-looking little girls clung to their mothers for the warmth and protection which those mothers were so unable to give. All were drenched with sea-water, and shivering with cold; but Charley bore himself bravely, and the faith and courage of Katherine and Mary had never shone more brightly than in that time of suffering and danger.

"We are like St Paul and his companions—watching, longing for the morning," observed the former faintly; "but not to us has been given the assurance which comforted them, 'There shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you.' We cannot tell that we shall ever reach those cliffs to which our eyes so anxiously turn."

"Surely, sister, we have the word, 'Not a hair of your head shall perish,'" Mary replied. "We know that, whether or not we reach that cliff, we have our feet set on a Rock, even the changeless love of Him who will either land us safe in our English home, or," she added more softly, gazing up on the rosy-tinted sky, "in a better Home up yonder."

It seemed to be so uncertain that the "Petrel" would hold together for many minutes, that Arthur Astwood held a consultation with his wife and sister as to the expediency of lashing the children to planks or spars, so as to give them a chance of being floated ashore.

"They would never reach the land alive," replied Katherine, shuddering at the thought of the terrible passage. "See yonder jagged points of rock which the ebbing tide is now leaving bare; our poor lambs would be dashed to pieces against them."

"Nor would we have the means of fastening the children, or of making for ourselves anything like a raft, without sacrificing the precious cord which my husband, at such peril to life, has carried to the shore," added Mary. "No, my brother, let us here together humbly await whatever fate it may please our Master to send us."

Scarcely had she uttered the words when a loud shout of "haul in! haul in!" was heard from the land. The call was instantly obeyed; Arthur, aided by Katherine and Mary, as rapidly as possible drew in the cord, Charley also pulling with all his might. The boy had, throughout the trials of the shipwreck, shown courage beyond his years; he had never uttered a cry or complaint, though he was repeatedly heard to mutter to himself, "I will never more wish for a gale."

There was some difficulty experienced in drawing in the cord, from the rope to which it was attached more than once becoming entangled in seaweed, or caught by some point of rock. But the very action of hauling restored some circulation to the wet numbed fingers that were employed in pulling in and winding up the cord. It was with an exclamation of thankfulness and relief that Mary, leaning

over the waves, at last caught hold of the end of the rope affixed to the cord, and drew it up through the green glassy water.

"Our bridge of life!" cried Katherine.

The perils of the party were not yet over, though every one breathed more freely as soon as Arthur had firmly fastened the rope to a part of the wreck. The rope formed but a slender bridge, and the children were too young, and the strength of their mothers was too much exhausted, to make their passage across the waters easy, or even safe, with only the rope to guide and support them. But they were not to be left to try that passage alone.

"See—see—there's some one from the shore jumping into the sea!" cried Charley.

"It is he—it is my husband!" exclaimed Mary: "he is returning to help me across!" and the rope which she was holding quivered from the grasp of a hand at the other end, as the swimmer used that rope as a leading line to guide his course to the wreck.

"Father — father! the funnel's bending down more and more—the water's coming up! we'll be drowned before he can get to us!" cried Charley.

The deck seemed giving way, the danger was imminent. "Into the water, my boy, grasp the rope tightly, never let go!" exclaimed Arthur.

The boy turned one earnest, it might have been a farewell, look at his mother, then, with unhesitating obedience, threw himself into the sea.

"Follow, my Katherine, follow; I will take care of Lucy!" cried Arthur, snatching his little girl from the arms of his wife. Murmuring a prayer, Katherine Astwood followed her son, and committed herself to the waves.

But at this critical moment the strength of poor

"Arthur sprang on land, his native land, and, falling on his knees, blessed the merciful Providence that had redeemed his life from destruction."—p. 249.

Mary Robins completely failed her. Her head drooped on her chest; she could scarcely support her child, and appeared to be ready to swoon. Encumbered as he was with his own little girl, Arthur knew not how he could retain hold of the rope, and aid to the shore his almost fainting sister and her child. To his great relief, he saw the head of Robins moving along the sea towards him, as the strong swimmer approached the wreck, his left hand catching ever and anon at the rope, while with his right hand he was beating back the waters.

The arrival of her husband seemed to give new energy to the exhausted Mary, to strengthen her, for his sake, to make one great effort for life. Relieved by him of the weight of her child, Mary too cast herself into the water; and then, last of the shipwrecked party, Arthur Astwood, with his little daughter, plunged into the green waves.

The worst peril was now over; guided and upheld as he was by the rope, Arthur found the passage to the shore comparatively easy. He bore one loved child with him; little hands were tightly clasping his neck as he moved through the briny waters, and he was following in the wake of other loved ones gone before. Every cheer from the shore which reached his ears told of the safe landing of one of the party,—the son, the wife, the sister, the friend, to whom he soon would be reunited. Of the family all were safe; not one was lost; no, not the feeblest amongst them. Soon with thankful delight, too intense for words, Arthur sprang on land, his native land, and, falling on his knees, blessed the merciful Providence that had redeemed his life from destruction.

And is there not something in this passage through the billows, followed by a safe and joyful landing,

which may serve to remind us of the final going through the waters of what we call death? *The silver cord of life,* with a Christian, can never indeed be broken; the Hand which grasps it at one end can never let go; but the nearer end is, as it were, fastened to a perishing wreck, the poor body which is left behind to sink and disappear from the sight of man. There may be something in the passage from which Nature recoils; the heaving waves may present some terrors to the mind even of God's faithful servant; but safety, and peace, and joy lie beyond on the heavenly shore. The night of terror, danger, and suffering quickly passes away; the celestial land is bright with the everlasting morning. Thither loved ones have gone before us; Oh! blessed is the family that shall meet unbroken and rejoicing in the Kingdom of Heaven!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Subject concluded.

SCARCELY had Astwood reached the land when the wreck of the "Petrel" altogether broke up, and nothing was seen of the ill-fated vessel save planks and broken fragments, which floated on the billows, or were thrown on the rocks.

Never to be forgotten was the kindness which the shipwrecked families received from their countrymen on shore. Rich and poor seemed to vie with each other in showing hospitality to the strangers who had so narrowly escaped a watery grave. The Astwoods and Robins had brought nothing with them from the vessel save the clothes which they had on; happily, however, they had sent on their little savings to England before them, so that they could only be exposed to temporary distress on their landing. But even this temporary distress they were not suffered to feel; gifts of food and clothing came from all directions. The Astwoods found a home for several days in the house of the clergyman of the nearest village; Robins, his wife and child, were hospitably welcomed to a neighbouring farm. The squire and his lady sent clothes and blankets from the Hall; and gifts of simple luxuries, the basket of eggs, the bowl of new milk, the home-made loaf, were brought from cottages around. Thus the Robins and Astwoods found themselves in the midst of abundance; and those who had seemed so forlorn and destitute on their first landing in Cornwall felt

themselves rich in friends before they left that beautiful part of our isle.

The bodies of poor Gawler and two of his crew were washed on shore during the course of the day following that of the shipwreck; they were so much bruised and battered that they could scarcely be recognised. On the next evening these bodies were committed to the grave in the peaceful churchyard of D——. A considerable concourse of people attended on the sad occasion, and Robins and his brother-in-law were present as chief mourners. Very solemn were the thoughts of Astwood as he stood by the wide grave into which three coffins were slowly lowered. It was with deep sadness that he considered the fate of the unhappy Gawler and his crew, drowned beneath those very waters which had buoyed himself up to safety. Arthur could not help feeling some self-reproach for not having more earnestly spoken to these poor men the "word in season," for not having more earnestly prayed for their souls while he yet was dwelling amongst them. Had he known how short was to be their term of life, how soon they must render their last account, would he not have been more ready to trample under foot his pride and his fear of man; would he not have so pleaded and entreated that even upon hardened hearts some impression must have been made? The few words spoken by Mary to Gawler on the very evening before he perished in the waves were almost the only ones which had been addressed to the captain on the vital subject of religion. The first discouragement given by his throwing tracts into the sea had been sufficient to make his passengers almost entirely confine serious conversation and services of devotion to the cabin, where there was none to mock or oppose.

"Oh! my Lord, Thou who hast in mercy delivered me and mine from sharing the fate of these poor men, forgive me my coldness, my cowardice, my neglect towards them!" prayed Arthur, as he turned slowly and sadly from the churchyard, after the last mournful tribute had been paid, and the crowd began to disperse.

If it were possible for a ransomed spirit to feel sorrow in the world "where sorrow is unknown," surely it would be from regrets such as those which Arthur experienced by the grave of his drowned companions! Every day brings to most of the Lord's people golden opportunities of working for Him, by pleading for, and pleading with, those who are madly earning the bitter wages of sin. How are those golden opportunities constantly thrown away! How much is there, even amongst those who call themselves Christians, of the spirit expressed in the question of the first murderer, "Am I my brother's keeper?" How often do they, with the Pharisee, thank God that they are not like the sinners around them, instead of humbly seeking to win, by love and by prayer, the souls of those sinners for God! Let it never be forgotten that, while those whom God's Spirit has made "wise" unto salvation, *shall shine as the brightness of the firmament*, the higher promise to them that *turn many to righteousness* is that they shall shine *as the stars for ever and ever!* (Daniel xii. 3.)

May the fulfilment of that precious promise be yours and mine, dear reader! May the Spirit of God so warm our hearts, and inspire our lips, that we may earnestly and successfully follow the example of our merciful Saviour in labouring for souls. Our time here on earth may be short; our remaining opportunities may be few: may we be given grace to

redeem the time, for we know not how soon for us the angel of death may, at God's command, unloose

THE SILVER CORD OF LIFE.

THE END.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Conclusion.

I HAVE done my work; the last story is on paper; my little red book is full, and I have just written THE END after the CORD OF LIFE. What a crowd of thoughts these two little words, THE END, bring to an old man's mind! The volume of my life is almost full; I feel that I have entered on the last chapter; and soon the hand of the angel of death may write upon it THE END.

And now I am, as it were, glancing back at the whole book; memory is turning over the pages. How much of wisdom, goodness, and mercy, I see as regards my Maker's dealings with me; but as regards myself, alas! how many a blot of folly, or stain of sin marks each chapter of my past life! Were I to be judged according to that which is written in the book, with what misgivings, nay, with what terror, should I look forward to the end! Good resolutions broken, duties neglected, hasty words spoken, evil thoughts indulged, deadness in zeal, coldness in prayer, these things, and many more, would make me dread the coming judgment,

had I to stand before the great throne and answer for all the evil done in the flesh.*

But there are two words in the blessed Scriptures which take from death all its sting, and from judgment all its terrors. Is it not written in the Word of God, *There is therefore* NO CONDEMNATION *to them that are in Christ Jesus?* He was judged that His people might be acquitted; He was condemned that they might be saved; His merits outweigh all their sins; His blood blots out what is written against them; in Him have they righteousness and strength.† What deep, calm peace this assurance brings, this resting on merits not our own!

My Katie eagerly ran up to me this morning, bringing in her hand the first spring violet that she had found in the wood. Her face was beaming with pleasure. "Winter is past, dull, cold winter!" she cried; "see, here is the little messenger of spring! Soon the fields will be beautiful with golden buttercups, and the garden all gay with flowers; the trees will bud, and the birds will sing, and all your pains will go away when the sun shines brightly upon you."

Yes, I believe that my long winter is nearly past, and that brighter days are before me. But it is the "everlasting spring" and the "never-fading flowers" to which my hopes are now pointing. The songs to which I shall listen will be the songs of angels, and the sun which will shine upon me, be that sun which never can set! So with a humbled, yet thankful, heart I look back upon all the past; so with a stedfast and joyful hope I look forward upon the future. From the fatal CORDS OF SIN, from the galling CORDS OF AFFLICTION, my Saviour for ever

* Romans viii. 1. † Isaiah xlv. 24.

will free me; while unbroken will remain the THREE-FOLD CORD which unites me to those whom I have loved in the Lord, the parents, the wife, the friends who have entered into rest before me, and the dear ones who linger behind. There will be no need to lengthen MISSION CORDS when all, from the least to the greatest, shall know and serve the great King; but the SILVER CORD OF LIFE will stretch through endless ages of bliss, with the GOLDEN CORD OF LOVE, unchanged and unchangeable—even for ever!